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RENEGADE

The Fiction Works of Ludwig Lewisohn

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THIS PEOPLE

AN ALTAR IN THE FIELDS

TRUMPET OF JUBILEE

FOR EVER WILT THOU LOVE

RENEGADE

RENEGADE

by

Ludwig Lewisohn



THE JEWISH PUBLICATION
SOCIETY OF AMERICA

1942-5702

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE HADDON CRAFTSMEN, INC., CAMDEN, N. J.

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The First Book

FLIGHT

Chapter One

HE STOOD at his tall desk in this brown room, half parlor, half counting-house, and heard the sudden rattle of cart-wheels on the sharp stones of the narrow street. The Hebrew ledger lay open before him. But it was many minutes since he had attended to his work. Though he had been here in Paris for the better part of two years, it still seemed very strange to him that he, Josué, or—as we would say—Joshua Vidal, was in this crowded house in this winding alley behind the Hôtel de Ville of the city of splendor, of squalor and of the hard contentions of thought.

He had moments, such as this, when the beauty and the ardor of new thoughts struck no fire from his mind; when he could almost have wished himself back in the white house in Avignon or even in the Talmudic school there; when he saw himself with other urchins who also had to wear the Jew's hat there, under the Pope's rule, huddled at the base of the famous wall in the sparse shadow of a slender cypress, watching the agile lizards dart in and out of the immemorial masonry. And there were even better memories of later years during which his father had taken him on journeys to teach him, no

very apt pupil, the conduct of affairs. In this way he had seen the communities of Carpentras and Cavaillon; he had been as far as Narbonne, where Jews had dwelt for a thousand years and more; he had also seen castles and great people of the gentiles with whom his father had dealings; he had stood, a lad whom his father called with a touch of contempt Joseph, master of dreams, beside the dark and shadowed waters of that fountain of Vaucluse, where the great Petrarca had enshrined his love in those immortal verses.

He bit his lip. His father, for whom he had no great love, was right. Who but a weak fool would indulge in such sentimental reveries? It was only two days ago that he had visited the stalls of the booksellers on the Quai des Augustins. Fearlessly as no Jew in the old Provençal cities ever dared he had lifted his eyes to the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame de Paris. He took his courage from the books he had bought now at Saugrain, the Elder's, at the sign of the Lily, now at the better-stocked shop of Monsieur Pierre Martin, at the sign of the Ducat of France. From these books a palpable wind had seemed to sweep through his brains, a wind like that of late autumn which, in one rushing gust, will strip the trees of their innumerable brown and withered leaves till they are bare and will let through the light.

Great lucid hours he had spent over the *Social Contract* of Jean Jacques Rousseau and other hours that were not without a touch of dark agony over M. de Voltaire's *Remarks on the Reflections of M. Pascal*. The great Voltaire hated the Jews; Joshua's only comfort was that the sage hated Christianity and those who believed its doctrine scarcely less. Now on this last walk along the book-stalls opposite the tranquil river he had

bought of M. Pierre Martin a new tale of the irresistible Voltaire which had just been printed and was new for sale in the spring of this year 1767. It was called *The Simple Soul* and told with an inimitable wit and irony the story of a young Huron brought from the Wilds of America to dwell in Christian France.

Joshua slipped his hand under the heavy Hebrew ledger. There his precious copy of *The Simple Soul* was hidden. He durst show it to no one. He durst speak of the new thoughts that were cleansing the world and setting free the mind, to no one. His father, Mordecai Vidal, the hard sharp narrow man of affairs would scoff and snarl. His grandfather, Moses Ventura, in whose house they now were dwelling would, had he known, have spoken of that Elijah ben Abuyah of old who, alone of the sages of Israel, sought out the godless wisdom of the gentiles and inflicted on his soul and on his portion of the world to come irreparable hurt. He was alone. There must be, he had often thought, other young men in the Congregation of the Jews of Avignon and in that other congregation here of the Jews of Bordeaux, the "Portuguese merchants," who had read the books and burned with the thoughts of the new age. There had been no communication between him and such, if such there were. He scarcely saw them except in synagogue and there they stood beside their elders swathed in their praying shawls with eyes indistinguishable by the dim light of the wicks in the swaying lamps.

From far within the house he heard steps on the wooden floors and small stairs. They were hasty steps. His father's. Mordecai Vidal walked through life, as though he had, it suddenly occurred to Joshua, like Voltaire's "*Simple Soul*," the devil in his belly. His nar-

row head, the point of his hat, his thin eager nose, all strained forward. The long tails of his unvarying costume of grey flew diagonally behind him. Except for his religious duties, which he performed from morning-prayer to *Mincha* with a dry swift exactness, he seemed to have no aim except to increase the double fortunes left him first by his father, a trader in precious metals and stones to the Pope's officers in the County of Venaissin, and later by his wife, who had brought him a dowry worthy of the daughter of an ancient house among the "Portuguese merchants," the former "New Christians" of Bordeaux. Yet, despite his pursuit of fortune, he was a generous man. He supported the synagogue and Talmudic school; no *Meshulah*, or gatherer of money for worthy and religious purposes, was ever turned away by him; he had placed a great sum of money in his son Joshua's hands, partly for security's sake, partly, as he explained, to give the dreaming boy a sense of responsibility.

The door flew open. Mordecai stood in the middle of the room.

"It is Sabbath Eve. Close the ledger. What ails you?"

He spoke, as he always did in private, the old melodious tongue of Provence.

Joshua closed the ledger and shook his head slightly.

"I almost forgot."

"Ass!" Mordecai's faint smile tempered the harshness of the Hebrew word he used. "We still have a few moments before the service. Do you remember the matter of this wife of a certain Councillor of State by the name of Saint-Florentin?"

Joshua's mouth went dry and a little bitter, but a sense of protective prudence made him answer.

"Very well. She has brought jewels for sale. Her husband is a miser."

"That is it. And today she sent her maid, a wench both handsome and astute, to beg me for the love of God to lend her some of the sold jewels, so that her husband might not notice their absence at a great feast which the King will give in Versailles."

Joshua went cold in his belly.

"You will lend them, will you not?"

"Why should I? We paid a very fair price. Do you remember?"

"Yes, the price was fair."

"Then why should I peril both capital and profit? If the woman does not return the jewels, I have no recourse. If I accuse her, her husband may put her into a nunnery. And I, I am thrown into the Bastille."

There was a physical tightening about Joshua's heart.

"I think you might risk lending the jewels. It would be a humane act. Think of the poor woman. She will treat you honorably. Ideas are changing. Men and women of cultivation no longer despise us."

"Do they not?" Mordecai's face did not change and his tone was dry. "I have observed no difference. Six years ago it is when that poor imbecile Jacob Alexandre was strangled to death for sacrilege. There are other things. Ideas! I know that you read French books. Don't let grandfather know. Now, as to that woman. I may go on a journey when Sabbath is over. Buy from her no more, if she comes while I am gone; deal with her no more. That is what I came to say. Now go and put on your Sabbath garments."

Joshua climbed to his little room far up in the tall

narrow house. He had seen Madame de Saint-Florentin thrice and these three occasions had been strange and bitter ones to him. This had been so not because untouched senses and a too inexperienced heart had been overwhelmed. The matter was subtler and lay deeper. He had burned for a lovely kinswoman even in his adolescence. Here in Paris, young, tall, brown-eyed and brown of hair, dressed like the gentiles, a pocket full of ducats, he had roved not without adventure the streets that lay near the Tuilleries; the Comédie and the Opera had seen him night after surreptitious night; the eyes of elaborate, scented ladies in towering white headdresses nodding with flowers and jewelled birds had been upon him; once at least a footman had summoned him to the presence of such an one: he had been led to a huge dark house, to a magnificent and curtained chamber; sweets and wine had been brought to him and to the lady who played the stripped nymph with elegant abandon and told him that she was friend and fellow of that inimitable golden-locked Comtesse du Barry who had just been promoted to the rank of titular mistress of His Majesty, the King. The lady had not troubled to ask his name, even though he had determined, to his own secret shame, to answer such a question with the words "Jean de Vidal."

No, Joshua was no simple soul. There was now an agile, high-bosomed little seamstress in a shop not far from that in which the Comte Jean du Barry had found the miracle of the age, who feigned to sigh for his love and took his ducats. But these adventures had no effect upon Joshua's heart. He valued them, as he quite honestly knew, as proof that he, a Jew of Avignon who, until two years ago, had worn the yellow Jew's hat obligatory

in the papal county of Venaissin, could mingle with at least the half-world of the capital unnoticed, even admired. No one made the sign of the cross at his approach; women kissed his body and perceived no "Jewish stench"; he was a man and, so it seemed at least to others, a Frenchman.

The matter of Marguerite de Saint-Florentin was altogether different. She had come at dusk in a rented carosse, swathed in a huge grey shawl, from which flowed locks of her black unpowdered hair, accompanied by a tall large-boned peasant maid-servant. Her eyes were very long and very blue under the dark brows; her cheeks, faintly flushed with red, were flat under cheek-bones just high enough to give the face a touch of wildness; her chin and throatline reminded Joshua of a certain Sabbath beaker that had been wrought by Moors for a far ancestor in Spain. The lady's long white hands had clasped a jewel box of heavy glass lined with wadded rose-colored silk.

Joshua was both glad and grieved to think that the lady had never seen him. She had been closeted with his father in the counting-house parlor. He had watched through a tiny unobtrusive window in the wall, part of the old precautions of the watched and hunted. She had leaned on her maid. Her white forearms, emerging from the shawl, had held the casket. She had said in one breath. "I must sell these. I am told that you are honest."

Mordecai Vidal's face had shown no emotion.

"Who told you, Madame?"

"I may not say. And I only overheard. There was a great rout at the Duc de Choiseul's. His Eminence,

the Papal Treasurer of Avignon, was conversing with a lady. He said— Oh, God forgive me, now I have—”

“Be calm—soyez *tranquille*, Madame.” Mordecai spoke the light French tongue with a heavy Provençal burr. “His Eminence knows me well. He knew my father. He can vouch for our honesty. It is more than I can do for his. He used to pay us in clipped and shaved coin and keep the full-weight ducats for himself. If we made an observation on the matter he countered with the reminder that the Inquisition had been oddly inactive of late.”

The lady’s eyes had become moist and full of pleading tenderness.

“I beg of you to hasten the transaction. I must be in Versailles by dawn.”

The long fingers of Mordecai Vidal had spread the jewels out on a table. They were of no great worth or splendor. The pearls were orient but of baroque shape; the diamonds were heavy but flawed and of yellowish tinge. The settings were large and ostentatious. He had made a quick reckoning and had taken golden coins from the heavy oaken chest studded with huge nails and bound with many iron rings. The lady had barely counted the coins. She slipped them into a silken sack and fled.

Twice more she had come. Each time Joshua had watched her. She had become the vision of his days and of his nights. The gallantries in which he had engaged—and from which he did not cease—became as nothing. They paled beside this deeper flame. In her very arms the sensual little seamstress observed the wide-eyed absence of his mind from her. A perpetual ache, now sharper, now less sharp, gripped his vitals.

His young ardor for her was one of adoration and service. He scarcely desired her after the manner of the flesh. Yet he awoke in the middle of the night tortured by the thought of her obedient to the wishes of that execrable spouse whose miserliness forced her to sell her very jewels. For he was not unknown, that Councillor of State, that Saint-Florentin, who had inherited fortunes from two noble and ill-favored wives and who had now, fifty, sagging of chin, monstrous of belly, consoled himself with the young daughter of a poverty-stricken gentleman of Auvergne.

With a last shudder Joshua drew tight the leather through the silver buckles on his shoes. He put his hat on his unpowdered locks of brown. He was prepared to join his brethren to usher in with joy and gladness the Sabbath which the Eternal had given to his people Israel.

Chapter Two

HIS reverie had taken longer than he had thought. He entered the small crowded synagogue of the men who had come to the capital from the four communities of Venaissin, after the beginning of the '*Amidah*, the great prayer of the silent benedictions; mechanically, he joined in the cantillation and with a small sudden astonishment found a fresh meaning in the words: "Thou rememberest the lovingkindness of the Patriarchs: Thou wilt send a redeemer to their children's children." Perhaps this notion of a redeemer could be philosophically interpreted. Perhaps this new spirit of tolerance of which M. de Voltaire so inveterately spoke and wrote was a redeemer of Israel, rather than some messenger or Prince of God who would come to gather the exiles and lead them back to Zion.

The wicks of the lamps flickered. He could hardly see the candles on either side of the shrine of the Torah. The white woodwork both of the platform and of the six slender columns with their daintily carved Corinthian capitals gleamed faintly. His grandfather's tall silver-bearded form in long velvet robe and tall biretta alone towered in clean outline. But he saw that there

were more visitors, more men from far places, than was usual on an ordinary Sabbath Eve. Among the three-cornered hats of the Parisians he saw at least one white turban, probably worn by a Constantinopolitan, and several black ones which were the headgear of the men of Mahgreb, of the communities of the Moorish lands of Africa. Next he thought he saw a man turn and recognize him with a glance of large blue eyes. It was Cerfberr of Strasbourg, a subtle and intrepid man still under forty who often came to Paris and, having many affairs in common with Mordecai Vidal, came to worship here rather than in the clamorous synagogue of the German community.

Joshua found the ache in his heart less sharp. There was undoubtedly a Supreme Being, as all the philosophers of the age agreed; to worship that Supreme Being was a fitting thing for such a creature as man. Could not that worship, he reflected, be stripped of all particularism and clannishness, such as this of the Jewish people, which so infuriated the world, which seemed so hateful even to the philosopher, which so pitifully and cruelly divided even the Jews among themselves as in the book, so loathed by his grandfather, of that Isaac de Pinto of Amsterdam in which that "bastard"—such was his venerable grandfather's exact word—had thrown to the hounds of the world all Jews except that small and self-appointed aristocracy of the descendants of those who had not quite three centuries ago been driven forth from Spain?

The voices of the men rose. "For the Lord He is God. In the Heavens above and on the earth below. None but He." They hurried a little through the brief remainder of the service. They turned and slowly moved toward

the door, praying to be guided in the ways of the Eternal, wishing one another a happy Sabbath. Joshua stood still, as was his duty, to wait for his grandfather, Moses Ventura, who approached slowly but sturdily.

"Good Sabbath," said Joshua and kissed the old man's hand.

Ventura put his arm through his grandson's.

"We have important guests tonight."

"I saw Cerfberr."

"He was closeted with me this afternoon. But Jacob Brito of Genoa is also here and Aaron Monceca of Constantinople bringing messages from the great Rabbi Isaac Onis of that city. But that is not all."

The old man closed his eyes for an instant and pursed his lips with an expression of supreme satisfaction.

"I have a better thing to reveal tonight than any matters concerning which Cerfberr or Brito or Monceca could speak."

"What is it, Grandfather?"

Ventura pressed Joshua's arm.

"Wait, my son. It is a goodly matter. Hope has not perished in Israel nor the Eternal forsaken His people."

Joshua felt the rasp of a deep irritation. He too desired hope not to perish in Israel. But his hope was that Israel would be freed from its bondage here and now, in this land and in this city; that the priests and the overlords whom the French people also hated would be stripped of their power; that the infamous *lettres de cachet*, invented by that poisonous Father Joseph would no longer, as the Gazetteer smuggled in from Holland said, "humiliate the people of France"; that the Bastille would fall; that he were a human being like other human

beings and could go forth, a very knight, to rescue his beloved.

He had not meant to think so far or so boldly. He trembled. Ventura turned to him.

"Are you not well, my child? It is the season of fevers."

"I am well, Grandfather."

They were at the door of their house. They mounted the stairs. Mordecai Vidal and the three guests followed. Tamar Pereira, Joshua's widowed aunt, had lit and blessed the candles. She and a maid-servant, a woman from the Caucasus with a long still face, had prepared the repast. The men sat down and the Caucasian came with ewer and basin and white cloth to pour water over their hands. At the head of the gleaming table Moses Ventura lifted up his voice in the proclamation and blessing of the sanctification: "And it was evening: and it was morning: the sixth day."

The brief ceremony was soon over; the bread and wine had been blessed. Ventura turned to Aaron Monceca.

"This is your first visit to the West?"

Monceca was a small man in robe and white turban. He had quick black eyes and an inquiring pose of the head and a longish nose. He spoke French—the language they had to use on account of Cerfberr, who knew only French and German and neither Ladino nor Portuguese—rapidly and well. He now shook his head with an amusing dancing motion. Next he nodded as in approval of his own sagacity.

"My first visit. And I have traveled in the garb of the Franks, even to the wearing of a powdered wig. Thus I set out from Marseilles. Two merchants, an officer of the King's forces and I hired us post-coaches. The officer's name was Chevalier de Maisin. He was a very af-

fable gentleman and explained to me the exceedingly strange manners of this country."

"Are they so strange?" Joshua asked. The man's knowingness annoyed him.

Monceca laughed a high effeminate laugh.

"With the Sage Ventura's permission I will tell you of a matter that befell two days journey from Lyon at the town of Chalons-sur-Saone. As we drew up at the inn we heard the cries and growls of an angry mob. We asked the reason for this thing of a man at the inn's door. He replied: 'Gentlemen, the house at which the mob is gathering belongs to the apothecary Mirobolan. An hour ago he found Madame Mirobolan in bed with one of his shop assistants. A great rage seized him. He found an old blunderbuss wherewith to kill his rival. But the weapon did not go off. The young man jumped out of the window and as Mirobolan, still hot with anger, began to belabor the woman with the butt of the blunderbuss, she raised a dreadful crying and screaming, whereat the neighbors came and saved her skin.' I asked the man what justice would be visited upon the adulteress. He replied: 'She will certainly lodge a complaint against her husband who, having no witness to prove his assertion, will be obliged to pension her off at her parents' house. Such are our laws.' Seeing my extreme astonishment at this answer my friend the Chevalier de Maisin laughed. 'It is easy to see,' said he, 'that you come from the ends of the earth. *Éh quoi!* A woman who has a gallant adventure amazes you? You will become quite human if you stay long enough among us, and you will drop that affectation of austere virtue.'"

Once more Monceca laughed his high effeminate laugh.

The Rabbi Ventura's eyes seemed veiled. Jacob Brito, the Genoese, a round paunchy man, reputed to be rich and parsimonious, added his bass laugh to Monceca's treble.

"It is not otherwise in Genoa, not otherwise in Milan. And everywhere the rich and powerful set the example."

The dry voice of Mordecai Vidal arose.

"Doubtless. No one denies, for example, that the King and the Comtesse du Barry lived openly in sin, and even have the bad taste to flaunt their godlessness for all the world to see. But what concern of ours are these things? I say that we are to attend to our own affairs; the world makes it hard enough for us. We are here in this hour and in this house on sufferance. Yet this is better than much that has been and still is. Our brethren in Avignon still wear the yellow hat and are still driven to hear monks preach to them a doctrine which they cannot bring themselves to believe, for it is utterly foreign to them."

Joshua looked at his father. He had never heard him speak so many words on a matter not directly touching his business or his family. He had been an hundred times hurt and astonished by Mordecai Vidal's wooden indifference. He now perceived that that indifference was a matter of principle and choice.

Monceca laughed again. He passed his tongue strangely over his lips.

"You are accustomed to all these things. We of the East are not. My Chevalier de Maisin, amused at my astonishment and not knowing me to be of the house

of Israel, asked me to accompany him to the Comédie Françoise and instructed me that the riotous behavior there was caused by paid hirelings whom the author of the play had brought because there was a strong cabal against him. None cared about the merits of the piece and the tumult was such that I heard scarcely a word. After the play the Chevalier took me to the garden of the Palais-Royal, a place so notorious as a scene of adulteries that, as he said, 'Love wages a perpetual war against marriage here.' I confess that the women were of the utmost beauty and freedom of behavior—"

The Rabbi Ventura raised his heavy lids.

"Since when," he asked, "do Jews desecrate the Sabbath meal by discourses on the wild pageantries of the world of the peoples? Have you forgotten that we bless the Eternal for that He has separated us from all the peoples—*mi-kol ha-ammim*? You are lusting after the world, Aaron Monceca, despite your derisive laughter! And you imagine that that is a new thing? Our people did so in the days of the Greeks. Against that Makkabbi raised the sword of Israel. Our people did so again in Alexandria and the wrath of the Eternal came upon them when the maddened monks led by a certain Cyril slaughtered the community, men and women and children. Let us discuss Torah."

A fire of rebellion burned in Joshua's vitals. No, no, this was not, this *could* not be the way. This was to render eternal the ghetto, the yellow hat, the hot seclusion. His grandfather did not know that this world was no longer the ancient world. The light of reason was beginning to shine and the peoples were marching toward the ideal of a common humanity. If only he dared speak in the presence of the elders. He turned toward Cerf-

berr's long thoughtful face. Cerfberr was stroking his sparse yellow beard. He seemed to catch the signal and the prayer in Joshua's glance.

"With your permission, Rabbi—" he bowed toward Ventura—"I must beg to distinguish. Our friend Monceca's delight in the ladies of the Palais-Royal is a small matter. It does not touch any issue and will contribute to no event. Yet it, too, has to do with the spirit of this time. It is true that I am the only Jew permitted to live in Strasbourg and that only because I have been very scrupulous in large dealings concerning the furnishing of the King's army with cloth and grain and iron. It is also true that when I move from place to place I must pay the *péage corporal*, like an ox or horse." He stopped and smiled a wry ironic smile and took a sip of wine from the beaker before him. "Nevertheless, Rabbi and friends, we are not where we have been. There is something abroad in the world that has not been before. The spirit of this time is a new spirit. I will speak with your permission of certain things that are happening among us the Jews of the North and East, for you are not of those who, like Isaac de Pinto, would shatter and divide the house of Israel."

Ventura bowed. Devoutly he said: "*Kol Yisrael chaverim*—all Jews are comrades."

Cerfberr looked at Joshua, as though bidding him to hear his words.

"It is near twenty years ago when a young German poet named Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote a comedy called *The Jews*."

A deep fold appeared between the eyes of the Rabbi Ventura. Monceca leaned forward; the heavy lip of Brito hung loose. Joshua found himself a little breathless.

"In this play," Cerfberr continued, "there was drawn the character of a Jew who was noble and selfless and of elevated mind. The theologians were bitter. One, above all, a famous scholar named Michaelis protested, saying that there could not be such a one. But Lessing had a young friend, a Jew of Dessau, son of a scribe, who has since become famous under the name of Moses Mendelssohn. In a letter which Lessing caused to be printed this Jew cried out against this base justification of the oppression of our people. 'Let the world continue to oppress us,' Mendelssohn said, 'let it imprison us in the midst of its free and happy citizens; let it vent on us scorn and contempt. But let it not seek to rob us of our consolation and refuge—the virtue of our lives.'"

Joshua turned his suddenly moist eyes toward his grandfather. But the old man's eyes were again hidden.

Cerfberr raised his voice perceptibly. "And I wish you to know, Rabbi, that the best part of the world heeded those words. Moses Mendelssohn has written works in the German tongue which have brought him honor and glory. Learned men call him the 'modern Socrates' and the 'Jewish Plato'; it was a philosophic Frenchman, the Marquis d'Argens, who persuaded the King of Prussia, the illustrious Frederic, to grant Moses Mendelssohn the right of permanent residence in his capital. I say to you that I see a dawn. It is faint and far. But the sky is flushed."

It seemed to Joshua Vidal as though his breast would burst. At last, at last a living voice from among his own people echoed his passion and confirmed his hopes. Like ten thousand other youths of Paris and even of the provinces he had devoured that "armored gazetteer, printed an hundred leagues from the Bastille at the sign

of Liberty" which flayed the corruption and castigated the oppression of the age. He cared no more for the reverent silence he owed his elders. He half rose; he spoke.

"The sky is burning, Grandfather and Reb Cerfberr! Men are saying openly that the difference between the Inquisition and the Bastille is but the difference between a mad dog and a mad wolf; they are saying that the prisons of France and the stranglings of Turkey and the desert exiles of Russia are one and the same thing and must cease. Warnings are slipped into the very breakfast napkins of the King. The great are not spared, nor are the priests. 'Tis a common jest that the Duc de Choiseul, having by chance bitten his own finger, fell into hydrophobia, and that the notary of St. Eustache was found bedded with the wife of the mayor—"

"*Sha*—be still concerning such lewd matters before your grandfather," Monceca suddenly barked.

Cerfberr laughed softly.

"Was your tongue so delicate?"

Mordecai Vidal frowned.

"These things may be so. How do they concern us?"

Joshua clasped his hands.

"They are heralding in the spirit of liberty, Father—that honest liberty which elevates the mind even as slavery causes it to cringe. That is what the great Voltaire meant when he said that the light comes nearer and nearer; we shall let those who will not see die in the shadows. But true knowledge cannot but lead to tolerance. The old world is dead forevermore—the world that burned men at the stake for cause of conscience and that shed the innocent blood on Saint Batholomew's

Eve. Oh, we are still far from our goal. But it is nearer than we think."

He had never spoken so before. He had never uttered such words. They were like fire and like wine. The speaking of them seemed suddenly to make him great and free, as though he himself could lead men into the light of a new world; as though he himself could, another Moses, rescue an entire people from bondage. And somewhere on the horizon of his inner vision he saw a pair of long blue eyes and a pale brow and a full sad mouth and a chin curved like a precious silver cup.

He looked up and now saw upon him the large black lustrous eyes of his grandfather.

Moses Ventura said, "I have heard your tale, Cerfberr; I have heard the hot words of yonder child. I have outlived the span of human life, as David, the King, counts it by ten years and two. Shall I say that I do not believe your words? Then you would say that is the stubbornness and weakness of old age. But I do believe them. You have read the books of the peoples of the earth. I have not. And doubtless your report is true. But I say, too, that my heart misgives me at your words. Are those words meant for us—are they meant for the *goi kadosh*, the holy people? And if they are so meant, will the people still be holy when they have lived by the meaning of those words?"

There was silence. Cerfberr stroked his beard. Joshua felt the great fever of hope and elation within him smoulder to embers. Monceca wagged his head and Brito seemed a little overcome by the wine that he had drunk. Mordecai Vidal, the ever sober and helpful, turned toward his father-in-law.

“Let us cease speaking of these vexatious matters. You had a goodly matter to reveal to us tonight.”

A melancholy came over the old Rabbi's face. He drew a scroll from the inner pocket of his long robe.

“A great joy came to me which I desired to impart and share with you. Now it is shadowed and dark. It came in a letter from the Land of Israel written to old friends by Joseph, the Scribe, of Safed and sent to me. Despite the grievous earthquake that shattered the sacred mystic city of Safed eight years ago, there comes from the letter a great light—a light which, I had hoped, would shine upon the foreheads of us who live in the darkness of exile. Now it is late and you tell me that our darkness is no longer such.”

His tone was bitter. For a moment he gnawed his beard.

“Yet hear these few words! ‘Thrice each year pilgrims visit the grave of Rabbi Shime'on bar Jochai at Meron near Safed. All through the month of Ellul the pilgrims study there for a day and a night the holy mysteries of the Book of Light, the *Zohar*. And there is a day which is called the marriage day of Rabbi Shime'on with the *Shechinah*, the spirit of the Divine Presence; and on that day men dance to the music of harp and psaltery and flute and drum. And they make them beautiful feasts; for the saying is sure that he who dies in exile is among the dead but he who dies in Israel-land is called living. In exile the bier is covered with a black cloth; in Israel-land it is covered with a white.’ ”

A sob came from the old man's breast. He unrolled the scroll a little farther. His voice faltered as he read: “The palm branches and the fruits of Paradise for the Feast of Tabernacles are brought from Sidon to Jerusalem. But

both thrive, though not equally well, in Safed. Here, however, the myrtles are beautiful and they are brought fresh and fragrant into the houses of prayer and study, and the loveliness is like the loveliness of the garden of Eden.' ”

His voice had become almost a whisper. He rose. He clasped the scroll to his bosom.

“You have darkened the light for me.”

He gathered his robe about him and went out with bent head.

Chapter Three

MORDECAI VIDAL did not go on the journey he had spoken of at the end of the Sabbath. April rains set in. The gutters of the town became rivulets and crossroads became pools. There were no fine glittering ladies on the promenade of the Tuileries. But since staying home invited the spleen, there was to be heard all afternoon the rumble and splash of carriage-wheels and the curses of the coachmen. In a hired coach Joshua paid one visit to a well-known resort of gaiety which stood at the corner of the Rue Saint-Sauveur and the Rue Dussoubs. But the surly gaming of the ribald gentlemen only made his own melancholy the deeper and the rosy purchasable ladies fluttered their ribbons and tightened their garters in his sight in vain.

He had fled on that one occasion to escape his father's small, dry, insistent quarrelsomeness. Not to be able to stride forth in the pursuit of some end, whether an immediately advantageous one or not, bore heavily on Mordecai Vidal. Moreover, that Sabbath eve conversation had touched his mind with an unwonted dismay. He talked in a small, steady, irritable flow to his son.

"We are all here on sufferance. Do you know that?"

By the old letters patent of Henri II even our brethren in Bordeaux were permitted to settle there only in the character of Portuguese merchants and New Christians. Except for those of the Ghetto of Metz, all of our people were formally banished by a royal decree of 1615. That decree has never been revoked. Did you know that?"

Accusingly he threw the question at Joshua.

"No, I did not."

"You did not. Aha! And your great philosophers, the heralds, according to you, of a new age of tolerance and freedom—what have they done? Have they even spoken against this horror and this injustice? As a matter of law and royal decree and declaration, we are supposed to do what? To cease to exist, to be nowhere, to fade into the air? And I only fear that this new turbulence and loquacity which I note will make us conspicuous. Then we shall be told to go. Where? Where, I ask you? Does that face of impudence, Aaron Monceca, go about the land prating of the moral corruption of the Christians? He need then only to be known as a member of our nation for us all to be expelled."

"How should I know, Father?"

"And where do you go in that green-rosy embroidered coat of taffeta and those black silk breeches and white hose and silver-buckled shoes and tie-wig? Think not that I have not observed! No, do not answer; I am unwilling to know. But some fine day you will be discovered. What then?"

A feeling for his father's pain awoke in Joshua's heart.

"Father, I think there is a change and the danger less than you think. A certain Rabbi Chaim Azulai came lately from Jerusalem. He was, I have been told, brought

to court by one of the great ladies of the kingdom and well received."

Mordecai Vidal had been striding up and down. He now stopped. He stood for a moment in front of the window gazing out on the rain which still fell in glinting threads. He turned. He lowered his voice.

"I am not so ignorant as you appear to think. Azulai came also to me. It was somehow noised abroad that he was from Safed and a master of *Kabbalah*. Now there are those among the Christians who think that men learned in our mystic lore are wonder-workers and sooth-sayers, and so foolish and light-minded women run after them and demand fortune-telling and even love-philtres."

Joshua looked up at his father in astonishment.

"How did you learn that?"

Mordecai Vidal's face gleamed briefly with a knowing satisfaction.

"We are vigilant. We had better be. Azulai did not yield to these follies. He gave the courtiers at Versailles a right explanation of the mystic teachings of which I, a mere man of earth, know little. But there are others less honest. A man named Moses Rodrigo has established himself among the lodging-houses and bordellos of the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs where he sells phosphorous mixtures and strange essences; he shows curious machines and gives himself out to be a '*cabaliste*.' Crowds wait in his outer chambers. He garbs himself like a magician on old pictures. He tells of future events with a great tome open before him which may be the *Zohar*, the Book of Light, or not."

Mordecai had sat down. He now leaned forward. His voice was thin and ominous.

"The Elders of the communities went to him by night. He will cease from this nefarious and disgraceful business."

Joshua's eyes seemed to him to blur with the suddenness of his anger.

"So we too are intolerant and cruel—we too!"

"Would you have us destroyed on account of a rogue's trickeries? It behooves the men of Israel to walk circumspectly and guard the interests of their fellows. Rodrigo admitted fraud and debaucheries. We will put the ban upon him; we will go so far as to whisper to the officers of the secular law."

"Does Grandfather know of these things?" Joshua asked, and his voice was tight.

Mordecai was once more his calm dry self.

"We do not trouble your grandfather with these vulgar matters. He dwells with the patriarchs and sages, may their names be for a blessing. He shares his wisdom with us at the appointed times. But it is well for you to know. We have wealth and would keep it; what would become of us and our poor were we robbed and driven forth? We have tranquillity and must guard it. There is a rumor from the court concerning a new law which might—I say merely 'might'—enable us to open shops. The elders will oppose it."

"Why? Why?"

"Ask your grandfather. Of *this* matter we did speak to him."

"A little light of freedom shines," Joshua said bitterly, "and we ourselves put it out."

Mordecai Vidal arose.

"I have said to you: ask your grandfather. Knock at the door of his study. He will be ready to receive you."

Slowly he went out and closed the door softly behind him. The rain rattled and rustled suddenly with many small voices and a great desolateness fell upon Joshua Vidal. Here he was in this closed square room in the Juiverie, the Jew's street. And the room was hushed and the house and the street. And all the people in the street, even the men studying in the hidden house of study, lowered their voices and lowered their eyes and bowed a little in order that lurking wrath and stealthy hatred might not be aroused against them. And this thing had gone on for centuries and centuries and his own life would be this life of hush and mean sobriety. He saw himself suddenly, luminously, in his French garb walking along the Quai des Augustins and stopping in the shops of the booksellers and listening to the men's lively and salty converse; he thought of himself with his merry little seamstress strolling in the Luxembourg garden. Stab after stab, sharp, exquisite—was it the extremity of pain or of delight—pierced his heart. Flight! One could flee. One could take coach-and-four or coach-and-six and with gay-garbed postillions, one blowing a merry tune on his horn, drive out into the fair land of France with its orchards and vineyards and ancient farmsteads and turreted towns, and reach a park, a great park with long umbrageous avenues of the clipped stately yews and box-trees, and come upon the margin of a long, long vista of gleaming water, and find there under secular oaks in the silken dress of a divine shepherdess a form, a face; and it would be the form, it would be the face of Marguerite de Saint-Florentin.

His face fell on his outstretched hands. He felt a tear upon his fingers. Only an arrant fool would dream this dream and see this vision. He knew why he was bidden

to knock at his grandfather's door. It was not for philosophical conversation, though the aged sage was ever kind and reasonable. It was to be told that, having lately reached his twenty-third year, it was no longer excusable not to consummate the marriage with the small dainty Deborah de Leon to whom he had been betrothed for years and who, being herself sixteen, would be ashamed if she were not soon led under the marriage canopy. Money had been entrusted to him for this purpose: that he establish a house and increase Israel more than his father had done, and also for the purpose that he increase it for those sons and daughters whom he would beget, seeing that money was the only shield and defense of a Jew, who was forbidden to ply a trade or practice a craft or till any acre of earth.

He kept his hands over his face. Now his desolateness was grey and without tears. It was dull. Faintly he wondered how his people had been able to endure. Had no pang of rebellion ever visited his father or the other elders? Nor even the youths of his own age—not Job de Lopez, tall, grave, reserved; nor Nehemiah Lechitski, newly arrived from Poland, who wore his silken *Caftan* and fur-rimmed hat with so much dignity and spoke many languages with grace and dared to discourse even with the sage Ventura on equal terms? Was he, Joshua, just a poor foolish frivolous creature who cared for neither business nor study nor devotion nor kin nor clan nor people? Oh, there was a heroism that he loved with a glowing heart. Voltaire had known that if he published his *Philosophical Letters* as they stood, the monks and priests would rise up against him and suborn the law and persuade the King's officers and cause him to be banished from France. He had gone into exile as the great

Descartes had done before him. From his Swiss retreat the light of his mind shone over Europe. And Europe applauded from end to end.

Joshua got up heavily. An imbecile, being a Jew in the Jew's street, to think such thoughts. They were not for him. He had better seek out his grandfather, as he had been bidden to do, hollow though his heart was.

Carrying, as it were, the heavy burden of himself, he went from that room into a corridor, short and dim, climbed a small flight of stairs and then passed through another corridor long and narrow and strangely resonant with the forlorn patter of the rain. At its very end he knocked at the dark familiar door and passed through it and saw his grandfather's silhouette against a dim, streaming window and saw on all sides of the room the shadowed rows of folios in their calfskin bindings.

From his high-backed armchair the Rabbi Ventura greeted him formally: "*Baruch habba!*—Blessed be he who comes," and Joshua answered with equal formality: "*Baruch ha-yosheb!*—Blessed be he who dwells here." Ventura waved lightly to a chair beside him. Joshua sat down. He could not raise his eyes. He was ashamed of his inner confusion. Why should a plaintive and yet gaily heartless air of Rameau hum itself irresistibly in his mind at this moment? Why should he see in his imagination now fleeting white glimpses of a gentleman coming upon a lady in a park at the foot of a naked statue? Behind the statue he perceived a tree gently tossing in the winds of a bland spring day. He felt his face flush and became aware of the chill of his hands and feet.

"Concerning this marriage," the Rabbi said slowly, "it is high time that the contract be completed. The

border has been beautifully illuminated. What good is that without the text?"

There was silence. Ventura raised his head and peered at his grandson.

Joshua was near tears.

"Must it be, Grandfather?"

He took the tone he had used in his childhood and boyhood. At once he was ashamed of that too.

The old man's great dark eyes seemed now to bend above and overshadow him.

"I will reply to your question by another. What means your 'must?' You have been taught the saying of the Rabbi Akiba: 'All is determined, yet the will is free.' You cannot be forced to marry Deborah de Leon. Nor another. But the Holy One, blessed be He, made us so that as a matter of both will and desire we are impelled to carry out His command that we be fruitful and multiply. Is it not so?"

Joshua's whole head seemed to burn. He lowered it; he was grateful for the grey skies and the rain and the shadowy dimness of the room. His grandfather attributed to him the old traditional chastity of the Ghetto. For generations the sons and daughters of Israel had been chaste until they entered their marriage bed.

Almost in a whisper he replied: "It is so."

"Then we shall proceed with the writing of the contract."

There was no sound in the room save the rustle of the rain without. The Rabbi Ventura had lowered his lids and laid his two delicate old hands, palms down, on the oaken table. A sharp terror pierced Joshua's vitals. He saw that his whole life depended on this moment of this hour in eternity. He knew that if he

consented and married Deborah de Leon his fate would be frozen and fixed within the immutable old ways. Children would come; they and a mother in Israel would be his charge. Unless sudden catastrophe came—a revival of the Inquisition or expulsion—the slowly accumulated wealth of both branches of his house would soon make him an elder in the synagogue. His grandfather would pass away and his father grow old, and he would be, with Deborah's dowry added to his own inheritance, a prince in Israel, father and guardian of the poor and persecuted, of whom there were so many. Yet he would be a prisoner in the Jew's street and a butt and jest of every rogue and oaf beyond that street. And he would be obsequious to every gentile with whom he would have dealings, and beyond the last margin of his horizon would fade that brave gay world of France and Europe, and hidden from him would be forevermore that strange leafy vista at the end of which beckoned the face of Marguerite de Saint-Florentin. Iron was this silence. Cruel was this silence. He choked and gasped at last, terrified lest the silence become an iron cage from which he would never fight his way.

"I cannot do this thing."

The Rabbi Ventura raised his voice.

"Jews have before this read the books of the world's peoples and desired to mingle with the peoples. For this reason were the *Torah* and the *Prophets* and the *Writings* translated into the Greek tongue. Jews spoke Greek and almost deemed themselves to be Greeks. Where are they? They gave their sons and daughters to another people and their eyes yearned and their souls broke for them all the long day."

Joshua slowly raised his body and his head and sat erect; and his eyes met his grandfather's.

"It is different now. This is another age. This is a new age."

The Rabbi Ventura arose and from the wall at his right hand brought a book. He laid it on the table before him and lit a candle that stood there in a candlestick of earthenware. The small tongue of orange flame flickered an instant; then it burned steadily and with its little circle of light made a dark cavern of the rest of the room. Ventura opened the book.

"A man of your blood and mine, the Rabbi Solomon ibn Verga, wrote this book concerning things that happened to our people in olden days, and above all concerning what happened to the Jews of Spain and Portugal in his day. And these latter things he had beheld with his own eyes. He called the book *Shevet Yehuda*, the Scourge of Judah."

Joshua clasped his hands. What now? He knew faintly and did not desire to know. Shadows, memories! What of today? The Age of Reason. . . . The soft yet strong voice of his grandfather broke in upon him.

"In the year 5180 of our calendar a strong and destructive pestilence broke out in all the provinces of Germany and Provence and Catalonia, and a part of the Christians of those lands arose and asserted that the Jews had poisoned the streams—"

Joshua spoke. Now his voice was steady and firm. "It can never happen again. The light of science forbids such dark superstition."

The old man turned the pages of his book.

"In the days of King Don Juan, the son of King Henrico, new burdens were heaped upon our people

and new laws enacted against them. They were forbidden to deal in food of any kind and, above all, to sell food to Christians, for they were accused of having strewn poison into the spices of the East. And it was likewise forbidden that any Jew practice the art of medicine or surgery and all Jews were commanded to wear a scarlet patch—’ ”

“But that is over and of the past,” Joshua cried. “The progress of science and the philosophic enlightenment of mankind forbid such horrors and follies. Only in the Papal states are there such things today. You heard Cerfberr tell of that Moses Mendelssohn of Berlin.”

Again the old man turned the pages.

“ ‘From aged people who had been driven forth from Spain I heard the tale of a ship full of refugees on which a pestilence broke out. The master of the vessel landed these unhappy people on a deserted shore where they perished of hunger and cold.’ ” The Rabbi’s voice shook. “ ‘And how shall we relate and recount the persecution at Lisbon, whereof the most dreadful circumstance was this: that they took their men children from them and sent these to perish on uninhabited isles of the great sea.’ ”

Joshua desired to comfort his grandfather. A shimmer of gladness broke into the dusk of his soul through his belief that he could indeed do so.

“These are truly other times. In those very evil old days no one had heard of the notion of humanity, from which none are shut out; no one had conceived of the virtue of tolerance; liberty was not so much as a name. Truth is now the aim of man and it will triumph. You chide me for reading the books of the peoples. Would that, like you, I had a book here, a book by the great

Voltaire published but in this year. There are, he writes, no sects in geometry. All men agree upon demonstrable truth and are divided only on matters hopelessly obscure or false. It were blasphemous, he declares, to believe that God had hidden from men any truth essential to them."

The Rabbi closed the book before him. His voice was cold.

"I have not lived with such closed ears, my child, as not to have heard the name you name. And I am told that that goy despite fair words hates and has maligned our people."

"He had a quarrel with a Jew who sold him precious stones in Berlin."

"Had he had a quarrel with an Englishman, would he have hated and maligned an entire nation? Here in France in the days of my grandfather the priests gave us sacramental vessels in pawn and then robbed us on the charge that we had defiled them; here it was ordered on pain of monstrous penalties that no Jew have a Christian servant in his house; here it was asserted that each year we steal and crucify a Christian child and here it is said daily by their clergy that the *Talmud* is a tissue of blasphemies against their God and their Church. Here—"

*He interrupted himself suddenly. His eyes that had blazed grew soft. "I had not meant an angry passion to shake me. These things are as they are and will be as they will be. Hear the prophet: 'Open ye the gates that there may enter the righteous nation, keeper of faithfulness.'"

Heat seemed to flash as from a flame into Joshua's brain.

"Then we are never to benefit by the changes of the world nor ever to coöperate with men for good? You have told me dreadful things that have befallen Israel. They were all the results of superstition and of ignorance. If superstition is no more, if ignorance fades, these things can never be again. There may be dark lands in which they may linger. But here in this kingdom and in the realms of the Germans they can never, never be again."

The Rabbi Ventura arose.

"There is no peace with the wicked, the prophet says. Do you know why? Because there is no peace in the hearts of the wicked; there is peacelessness and hate."

"But man is good," Joshua cried. "That is the great discovery of this age. It is institutions and laws and superstitions alone that warp the mind and create prejudice and persecution."

"I marvel at your simplicity. Who has created these evil things out of his will except that human being whom your heathens declare to be good? In very truth, as Koheleth, the preacher said: 'God made man upright; but he has sought him out many inventions.' . . . But I am weary and must rest."

He seemed quenched suddenly and smaller. Joshua arose and offered the old man his support, but with a momentary closing of his lids the Rabbi Ventura shook his head and walked toward the door that led to his chamber within.

Slowly Joshua crept back through the dark corridors to his own room. He had won after a fashion. He had not consented to marriage. He had closed no last door upon himself. Yet he got no joy of the event. His soul was dark and his heart sore. He lit himself candles and

opened again that tale of *The Simple Soul* by M. de Voltaire and turned almost with tears to that tender passage concerning those strange fellow prisoners in the Bastille: "They ceased to dwell upon their own unhappiness. By a strange charm the crowded calamities, spread over all the earth, diminished the sharpness of their pain. They dared not to complain when all were suffering."

He lifted his eyes from the book. The storm had blown open his window. The rain had ceased. Through wildly flying clouds a clean-washed half-moon climbed the steep sky.

Chapter Four

DAILY at sunset there assembled in the garden of the Tuileries, where the lilacs were now in tight bud, a crowd of women who plied soberly enough a very special department of a most ancient trade. The crowd was motley: working-women in white caps, others of a faded gentility who called themselves widows, still others in great cracking hoop-skirts and huge ruined headdresses who averred that they had once been within the sunlight of the Court. These women came to offer themselves and their charms to dwarfs and deformed men and, above all, to aged men who were ashamed to seek the satisfaction of their needs in the ordinary resorts of what was known as pleasure.

From time to time one of these women made her fortune. Thus, a certain Mademoiselle Beaumenil, who had to the knowledge of many been for ten years a common bawd selling herself under the lanterns of Paris, had the good luck one day at dusk in the Tuileries to please the peculiar tastes of the aged Comte de Bintem. Now she drove about in a fine coach with a tall muscular footman next to her coachman on the box, and had her rooms in De Bintem's house on the Rue de

Clichy. She had, moreover, persuaded the Comte, who was reputed to have an income of four hundred thousand livres, to keep open house, supplying music and even gaming tables and not inquiring after the name or the quality of the guests whom Mademoiselle Beaumenil gathered in her daily afternoon drives and walks.

It was this Adrienne Beaumenil, high-colored, buxom, attired in voluminous velvet and shoes with golden heels, who stopped her coach and hailed the slim and graceful Joshua Vidal loitering near the Tuileries whither she often came to gloat over the contrast between her former poverty and present splendor. He stopped and approached, and flushed at the naked admiration in the woman's eyes.

"A fine young man like you should not be going about alone." She laughed a broad laugh. "Where are you bound for?"

"Nowhere," he replied. "I was but walking to shake off melancholy."

"Then come with me! You shall not be wasted. 'Tis well known that the French nation is so ill-constituted today that handsome and robust men are beyond price. Even a good strong footman is paid as highly by the ladies who require him as is a race-horse in England."

She held out a white but stubby hand and drew him up beside her in the coach. The whip cracked and the horses pulled. The lady chattered.

"I am the Comtesse de Bintem, if you would know. There is a great rout at my house tonight. Viol-players will be there, and a man vastly skilled on the harpsichord. The Comte is partial to Italian music. There will be gaming. But we must be seemly. The Comte has insisted on some of his great friends, such as the Marquis

and Marquise de Goesbriant and even, if he is to be believed, Monseigneur, the Comte D'Argenson, the Minister of War. There will be philosophic discourses, I fear. But let that be. . . . What is your name, my sweet boy?"

He felt himself grow hot again. He wrenched out the words: "Jean de Vidal."

The lady giggled.

"A good name and pretty, too. Do you know, you please me. I shall introduce you to a lot of fine people. After the rout we go back to the gardens. There will be—did you know—magnificent fireworks this night. The King will not come, 'tis certain, despite the rumour. But do you know who will be there?"

Joshua shook his head.

"Have you heard the gay ditty? All Paris sings it. Though I am the last to grudge the wench her good fortune. The Comtesse—Comtesse as much as I—Du Barry!"

In an affected voice she warbled:

"Who is it in Paris her charms has not known,
Whom footmen and nobles have had as their own!"

"How silent you are, my pretty fellow. Do you like my voice? I sang in the Opera once in a piece of the great Lully. All Paris was mad over me. But a cabal against me was started by two sluts, Des Orages who was, as everyone knew, an hermaphrodite, as I told her to her face, and Guimard who was brought to bed of a bastard by the dancer Leger and had the impudence to deny it. But virtue and talent are not regarded in

this world. I was thrown into the streets—and a girl must earn her bread, must she not?”

Joshua perceived eyes suddenly cold and hostile upon him.

“She must, indeed, Madame,” he said.

He felt a heavy moroseness like a palpable vapour streaming from the woman.

“Perhaps you had better permit me to descend, Madame?”

“Would you affront me, Monsieur, and refuse my invitation? We are here!”

The carriage stopped. Joshua gave the lady his hand to help her descend. They passed through a hallway into a flight of high rooms, crowded with people. Hundreds of candles in great crystal chandeliers served for illumination. She pulled her hand away and rushed forward into the glittering manicolored mass, leaving him near a group of gorgeous fops, silk-clad, white-wigged, one with a golden snuff-box in his hand, red-faced, huge-bellied, who was, he perceived, the professional wit of the company. The men laughed even before the thick moist lips were opened.

“The latest news, gentlemen,” he guffawed hoarsely. “Ah, ’tis a choice tidbit, indeed! The Comtesse du Barry has so replenished the King that he now performs as many as ten miracles in one night.”

Gusts of deep-bellied laughter arose. Joshua was terrified at hearing the gross blasphemy which would have cost a Jew his life. He gazed with horror at the fat man who took a pinch of snuff and went on: “But what is even more certain is this: the Prince Louis de Rohan was surprised in a house of debauchery by a commissioner of police who, before he knew the prince’s station

or quality, made him sign the formula required of priests who are discovered in *flagrante delicto*: 'I admit having known the daughter of joy named Rosalie to complete consummation, in witness whereof I sign my name.' Louis denies it, of course. Since no one ever heard him speak the truth, the evidence is perfect."

Amid the ribald laughter that arose again, Joshua looked about for a means of escape. But in either direction the long and lustrous room appeared the same, so that he did not know from what direction he had come. He was afraid to stir; suddenly he was afraid of being noticed, even though he knew that his habit and air were not conspicuously different from those of others in this place. Seeking to make his footfall soft and light, he moved away from that group of men. He saw now—for these had cut off his view—that other single loiterers were in the room, and so moved with more assurance toward the nearer door.

He passed through it and was astonished at the greater magnificence of this adjoining chamber. For this was the banquet hall and here huge heavy oaken side-boards bore fantastic platters of food: roast fowls adorned with their plumage, carps of monstrous proportions with lemons in their rosy snouts, a boar's head wreathed with parsley cunningly woven, towers of small cakes and sweets, horns of plenty gushing with luscious fruits. The bottles of wine stood, like soldiers, in serried ranks; the glasses glittered in the light of the sconces. Although it was early for supper, a few assiduous guests, mostly men, were already here eating from plates they had filled at the side-boards with heavy pertinacity. Two footmen in leaf-green livery helped the guests fill their plates. One approached Joshua who drew back in sudden involuntary

horror. He had never yet tasted ritually unclean food. But a wave of fear, stronger than his horror, forced him to accept the plate from the footman's hand. He held it, wretched and confused. He looked about, hoping that he could softly place the plate on a side-board and flee, when he heard a low, hoarse, hot voice in his ear.

"Monsieur is not hungry?"

He turned a little. A small swarthy man stood beside him dressed in a grey coat, grey breeches, a waist-coat of a dimmer grey, white stockings and ordinary buckled shoes. Was the man deformed? To call him that was to exaggerate. But something was wrong with the structure of his shoulders and his back, something too with the inordinately long, bony, hairy hands. The face, too, was all bones and bony angles. Out of deep hollows, greenish eyes looked peeringly at Joshua.

The hoarse hot voice went on: "It is not for me to question the reason for Monsieur's lack of hunger. I am not here for pleasure either. Once I was a colonel in the Pope's guard. Later I rendered the police of Paris some service. But they are ungrateful. The better you serve them the more likely you are to land in the Bastille or in the prison of Vincennes yourself. So I have turned merchant. My commodities are no common ones. Many of the great nobles of the kingdom are among my clients. I sell women, coaches, houses and parks, patents of nobility conferring authentic titles, as well as smaller matters, such as costumes, weapons, disguises of various kinds, potions of love and hate, methods by which to attain health—in short, I am a furnisher of equipment for any sort of life a man may choose to live. Do you think we could make a deal of some description? The Comte de Bintem, our host, will commend me to you;

so will—" he lowered his voice—"the Duc de Richelieu and a certain lady close to the king. I am to be found on the Rue de la Lune at the sign of the Black Mannikin, above the shop of Boucher, the wig-maker."

Slowly Joshua repeated the words: "On the Rue de la Lune at the sign of the Black Mannikin, above the wig-maker's shop. I have seen the place."

"That is well. I will relieve you of the plate if you are sure you are not hungry." Quickly and lightly, as by sleight of hand, he suddenly held Joshua's plate. "There are many kinds of hunger," he whispered, "more difficult to satisfy than the hunger for food."

Joshua's head swam. The points of the candles seemed to sway, although there was no draught.

"Guide me to the street," he said.

The small man led the way. There was something at once obsequious and impudent in his gait. But he knew the house, for in a moment they were in the cool dusk of the street. Joshua stopped and passed his hand over his forehead. Only now did the very great strangeness of what had befallen him grow clear to him. He turned to the man beside him.

"Who is this Comtesse de Bintem?"

"A whore," said the other drily.

"But there are great gentlemen and ladies within."

"Why not? This is a very honest house. At Madame the Comtesse de Nancrede and Madame de Busson and the Ladies Hardwich you, or any other personable stranger, would have been kept to go to bed with them. Why not, when there are two thousand kept women in Paris whose lovers have caused their husbands to be thrown into the Bastille; when the daughter of the Duc de Fleury goes with the Duc's permission to the barracks

of the Black Mousquetiers, so that the Marquis de la Rivière, ensign in that regiment, may make her children; when 'tis known that the councils of the kingdom are now guided by the fact that the woman Du Barry by feeding the King 'diabolino' and oil of cloves has spurred him on to such prodigious efforts that he scarcely leaves the 'small apartments'? Why not? Why not?"

The man had not raised his voice. But he had spoken with terrifying fury, and even in the dusk Joshua could perceive that the green eyes in those bony hollows glowed with a sinister fire.

"What are you?" Joshua asked. "Who are you?"

The misshapen shoulders gave a shrug.

"If you would have a name, call me Valdes. I told you that I had been in the Pope's service and in that of the police of Paris. My business is a very particular one. Would you have me name it?"

"I would."

"'Tis to help people creep out of their holes into which they have been driven: prisoners out of the Bastille and out of Vincennes, galley slaves out of their fetid holds, Jews out of their ghettos. When enough have crept out, do you know what will happen? There will be a conflagration and the world will burn and you will see the silks and ribbons of these fine ladies and gentlemen blacken and curl up and crumble in the flames, and maybe the white flesh of them too." He laughed. "Meanwhile, let us go, if you would, to see the fireworks in the Tuileries. The hour for them is near."

Why did Joshua suddenly remember that it was past the hour for *Mincha*, for afternoon prayer? Why did his deep soul murmur: "*Rahem 'alenu v'hoshienu!*—Have mercy on us and save us!" Was it that from this small

bony misshapen man there came to him a breath of hatred and of a hot lust for destruction? Did not Valdes condemn things that were in truth worthy of condemnation? Did he not predict freedom for the unjustly oppressed and imprisoned? Was he not then a friend of that honest liberty and tolerance of which the great Jean-Jacques and the greater M. de Voltaire had written? Yet Joshua's heart turned from this man. If his sleeve brushed the other's, he felt as he had done in his boyhood when a cold lizard out of the wall of Avignon ran by chance over his hand.

They walked in silence. Once or twice, under a lantern, Joshua saw the green eyes of Valdes turned on him with a strange and stealthy obliqueness. At that a gust of fear chilled him. He was glad that soon the streets began to fill with people on foot and in coaches. All Paris was on its way to the gardens to see the fireworks. A man named Openord had been famous for these inventions in the present King's youth. 'Twas said that he, now an old man, had left his retirement at the royal command to repeat the triumphs of his youth. And, indeed, Joshua and his companion soon came into view of a sky filled with manicolored fire. Streamers of blue and red and gold were flung across the horizon; from among them burst forth a fiery horn of plenty, from which poured out, as it were, the golden apples of the Hesperides. Joshua caught his breath. Valdes laughed his cough-like laugh.

"In Rome they gave the populace bread and circuses; here they give it fireworks and wine from a fountain. The half-naked starvelings slink forth from their dens and get befuddled on the King's wine."

Joshua only half heard.

“May one enter the gardens?”

“Freely,” Valdes said. “The great are in no danger. Every other fellow that you see is a police spy. Informers swarm. Be as obscure as possible. You will be transparent to the government in a week if you make a false move.”

Joshua shuddered inwardly. But a dark impulse drew him forward. They crossed the last jagged pavement and were in the open gardens, just beyond the royal palace of the Louvre, when there arose in the sky of night, after dull reports like those of a muffled gun, a huge ball of silver which opened and from which there emerged to float above the crowded spectators a Greek Temple, the Temple of Hymen, god of marriage, with columns and leafy Corinthian capitals and portico. It stood, that lustrous image, for perceptible moments. Then it quivered and began to lose outline and form and melted in a luminous mass of haze. Yet the garden was not dark. Torches flared here and there, for some of the noble spectators had brought footmen with them who bore lanterns and carried torches. Speech and laughter now rustled through the garden like a strong wind through trees. And near him Joshua heard a high, self-important voice that reminded him of the voice of Aaron Monceca.

He turned and saw a tall man with the belly of a prelate and the fat triple-chinned visage of an elderly cherub. A tailed coat, a long waistcoat of rose brocade, yellow silken breeches and enormous *fichu* of Flanders lace, all jauntily worn, did but seem to increase the man's girth. His wig, under his three-cornered hat edged with swan's down, was one great mass of curls, and his right heavily ringed hand grasped a tall ebony cane, topped by a Moor's head carved in ivory and set with opalescent

eyes of glass. The high complacent voice addressed a small company obsequiously attentive to it.

“Charming, charming! Especially that it recalls to us all His Majesty’s delicious childhood. Yet these artificial fires, like all things made by artifice, please me less than the divine simplicities of Nature. Now that spring is here ’tis infinitely sweeter and more worthy of the philosophic mind to contemplate the jewelled meads or to linger by some cool grotto. I had the honor to make that identical observation once to His Electoral Highness, My Lord, the Elector Palatine, and His Highness graciously agreed. ’Tis in spring, too, that I add to that trifling store of verse which, under the title of *Leisure Hours*, my friends, not least the illustrious Voltaire, are urging me to publish—without my name, needless to say, without my name. Where was I? Ah yes. Only this morning I added some verses to my small store. Oh, nothing, a mere trifle. Yet my friends may care to be the first to hear it.”

The eager murmur of his time-servers answered him. He closed his eyes, pursed his lips, laid his left hand across his heart and declaimed softly yet with an inimitably affected overemphasis on each word:

“*L’aimable verdure
Vient d’orner nos champs:
Avec le Printemps,
Renaît la nature:
Tout charme nos sens.*”

A round of discreet applause was heard. Something like a subdued hiss of contempt from Valdes sounded close to Joshua’s ear. But Joshua scarcely heard, for the group about the great person in rose brocade had shifted and

he saw the back—straight and graceful despite the huge hoops—of a lady in a robe of sky-blue damask adorned with silver *lamé* and pendant knots of emerald-hued ribbons. A pain more to be desired than any pleasure, pierced his heart. Impetuously he stepped forward to look upon the lady's face. It was she—it was the face that he had seen an hundred times in dreams of the night and visions of the day, that he had never seen but grave and in distress, that here and now, perhaps, in this abode of gaiety and fashion, might smile, might glow. Why did he feel lighter, despite his hope, when it was sad—sad to the very depth of those long blue eyes? But how could she be otherwise than sad? For who was he in the rose brocade costume, that braggart, that fool, with icy eyes set in the falseness of that cherub face but that Minister and Secretary of State, the Comte de Saint-Florentin, her husband?

He stood quite still. He heard words and murmurs and even laughter, but the sense of no word reached him. Valdes plucked him lightly by the sleeve. He lifted his arm to avoid the touch. He watched the lady's melancholy face, that face which shone—where had he read the words—"even like the moon among the lesser stars." He waited and watched until at last she lifted her eyes. First he lowered his before the sweetness of her glance which was greater than he could bear. Then, desperately, he raised his own again. They looked into each other—those two pairs of eyes. They melted irresistibly into each other. Waves of a strange passionate magic, akin to darkness, akin to light, surged through Joshua's breast. Next his eyes grew moist at the corners and his hands trembled. His foot moved forward when he felt a fierce clutch upon his arm through cloth and flesh, and turned and,

glancing back, saw Marguerite de Saint-Florentin moving closer, as if in sudden fear, to the group of her friends.

He let himself be drawn away from the bright spaces near the Louvre into a darker part of the garden, only half hearing the hoarse, half-evil, almost grimly chuckling irony of the voice of Valdes.

"You have a great desire for the rotten straw and stinking bones of the Bastille, have you not? A spy was already watching us. Oh, there are few things a handsome young man like yourself cannot aspire to." He all but snarled like an angry dog. "Few things. The woman is probably not stingy with her bed."

"Be silent!" Joshua cried.

They had left the garden and reached the street.

"You are a great booby," Valdes said. "So much is clear. I would not trouble to have any dealings with you if I were not a man of affairs who likes to turn an honest penny. Forget all that I have said to you, though you probably understood little. But if you want to save your skin you had better not forget my little address on the Rue de la Lune above the shop of the wig-maker. Good night."

He turned and soon faded into the darkness. Joshua, with burning head and with heart both icy and stricken, set out on the long way to the Jews' street.

Chapter Five

MORDECAI VIDAL had gone upon his journey. Very grave matters, as he had explained to his son, were at stake. Matters of business, such as the collection of interest upon a great sum advanced some years ago to a Christian ship-owner of Marseilles. Since Jews were not permitted to own mortgages on Christian properties and since the promisory notes and notes of surety given them could easily be cancelled by a bribed official or by a threat of expulsion, these collections were difficult and delicate. There were also matters of another kind: The Jews of Bordeaux, the famous "Portugese merchants" who had obtained their right of residence in the kingdom under the guise of "New Christians," were frightened at the numbers of their people from Avignon and the other three congregations of the Papal state who sought refuge from oppression and humiliation in their city. They masked their cruel fear as pride; they were ready to appeal to the ministers of the king against their brethren of Avignon, blind both to the necessity of compassion and to their own interest.

Joshua heard his father's dry and sober explanations. At the end came the matters that were left in Joshua's

care: the collection of sums due on certain dates; the refusal of loans during his absence except one to Cerfberr, whenever a messenger of the latter were to arrive from Strasbourg: "Cerfberr's plain signature is sufficient; his word is sufficient. He is a just man. Not even the King's officers dare deny that. Buy no gold or precious stones. It is a traffic into which we were forced by evil circumstance. We are bankers today, as much as were the Lombards who went to London, even though hate and prejudice deny us the name." His father's lips had closed tightly. Then he had opened them once more: "Prepare for your marriage. I am tired of this silent childless house!"

Those words, such as he had never before heard from his father's lips, had saddened Joshua. For he knew that the thing his father hoped would not come to pass. He understood business not too ill. Though he relished the bladelike wit and rare glow of Voltaire and the strict and economical eloquence of La Bruyère; though he was uplifted by the majesty of Lully and melted to the sweetness of Rameau and though his eyes were not indifferent to the pastoral charm of Watteau and the elegance of Fragonard—yet though he loved these things he would not have been discontented to be the owner of a counting-house on the Rue Saint Honoré. But that he in this Age of Reason and Humanity should dwell forever in the dark Jews' street and be cut off from the light and rumour of the world, was a thing unbearable and not to be thought of.

Darkly he brooded in his many hours alone. Had this terrifying thing that he contemplated ever been done before? Had a Jew ever before fled from his people and his place, and mingled with the world and lived and died

away from the House of Israel? Tales faint as legends heard in his childhood came to him. Tales with which to scare children. Yes, there had been this one and that one who had become a *meshumad*, a renegade; there were even those who had become priests and prelates and denouncers and persecutors of their own people. Involuntarily at the thought of such he breathed in Hebrew: "Not of us be it said." Then he smiled with a great relief in his heart. For all these tales belonged to dark and superstitious times with no gleam of science and philosophy. A man today, if he fled and lived with the gentiles and became great through association with philosophers and with the friends of freedom—ah, such an one might well be among those who would bring tolerance for the Jewish people. Had he not but the other day seen a book in defense of Israel called *Letters of Several Jews to M. de Voltaire* and had not his agreeable acquaintance, the book-seller Saugrain of the Quai des Augustins, said with a wry smile: "Fine doings these! 'Tis notorious that the letters were writ by no Jews but by the Abbé Guené. Fit task for priest to defend that accursed crew! Yet better than to be caught, like the King's adviser, debauching the pages at Court; better than that infamous Madame Latousse who insisted that the executioner of Paris come, so to speak, red-handed to get her big with child." He had turned to Joshua. "I am an old man now, my fine young sir, and no longer understand the ways of the world. I like neither the debauchery of the great nor the free-thinking, as the saying goes, of the philosophers. I like neither Jews nor heretics. But I like stake and pillory and prison no whit more."

The good man's words had remained with Joshua. Even those who clung to the old thoughts of the world

could not brook the cruel old ways. Though their minds might lag behind, the light of Reason had touched their hearts.

His dreams and thoughts and plans were like wine to Joshua. And spring made headier the wine, compounded as it was of passion and of generous hope, with blossoms of white lilacs, of which the petals blew across walls from secret tangled gardens and from trim terraces about the houses of the great. He wanted at once to set out on a long journey, a journey away from gloom and narrow streets, from immemorial prayer and ceremony, from the Hebrew ledger and the jagged cobblestones, from all his now accustomed life into the openness of both mind and land. He saw the landscape of his childhood. He saw himself within it. But not as a Jew of Avignon in yellow peaked hat. He saw himself straight and free on the saddle of a swift roan horse, with cream-light mane and tail, dashing past the tall gloomy palace of the Popes at Avignon and riding freely through a free air across that Pont du Gard into the shimmering city of Nîmes.

He knew that these delightful dreams were not enough. He knew that it was not enough to keep away from his grandfather and to try to forget the pang of conscience and ache of heart which this thing caused him. He went very strictly upon the errands of his father's bidding. He knew that one of them was taking him to a house on the Rue de la Lune, not far from the sign of the Black Mannikin above the wig-maker's shop. He did not seek to hasten the day of this errand. But at the appointed time, the necessary business with a Chandler having been completed, he climbed the stair to the floor

above the wig-maker's and smote the small brass knocker on a colorless door.

A frowzy dark boy in a green leathern apron opened the door. He let the fine young gentleman in without delay and ran to fetch his master. Joshua, determined not to be browbeaten or scared, calmly regarded the strange jumble in the long dim room. A great stuffed owl sat on a mahogany column in front of a shelf full of white apothecary's jars. Unframed canvases and oriental fabrics lay at random at the foot of the column. In a great glass-case to the right, he saw painted ivory fans and boxes of Japanese lacquer and elephants carved of jade, rock-crystal and lapis-lazuli. He was tempted to shrug his shoulders. A curiosity shop like an hundred others. Perhaps the man Valdes was a braggart—or perhaps this innocent merchandise served to disguise his other and more serious trades. . . .

Valdes slept in softly on soles of felt. He wore a grey housecoat. An ironic smile shifted from feature to feature of his bony face.

"Aha," he said. "The young lover of great ladies."

"Let us stop this folly," Joshua said. "You bragged the other night of a variety of things you had for sale or could procure. I have come to put you to the test."

The face of Valdes seemed to close.

"Come with me."

He led the way into a comfortable not inelegant inner room. There were fine embroidered chairs and a broad mahogany desk and a tall wall-cabinet of ebony, in the taste of the late King's age with innumerable small mirrors set in its front and tiny onyx columns.

"Let us be seated," Valdes said. "What do you want?"

Joshua spoke in his soberest voice. He had gotten the

money due from the surly chandler who had cursed the Jews but paid the gold.

"I want a coach-and-four, a small exquisite house in Versailles near the estate of the Comte de Saint-Florentin, servants, all necessary equipment and a patent of nobility for the Chevalier Jean de Vidal of Aix-en-Provence."

A huge fly hummed audibly and, in its stupid random flight, thudded against the window pane. Valdes peered at the floor.

"Very well," said Joshua, offering to rise, "I feared that you were bragging."

Valdes looked up and laughed hoarsely.

"Unless you tell me who and what you are, how do I know that I will be paid?"

"I will pay you in gold," Joshua said, "for all things at proper prices. I am not unaccustomed to affairs and know what things are worth. If you make a reasonable profit on the house and the coach and the horses, you can throw in the piece of paper with the name."

Valdes laughed again.

"If the piece of paper, as you call it, is to bear a king's seal, without which it is worthless, 'tis likely to cost as much as all the rest put together."

Joshua shrugged his shoulders. "I know Provence. The officials are grasping and venal but, being poor, a little money seems a great sum to them."

"You know Provence?"

Valdes' eyes were searchingly upon him.

"'Tis not to the purpose," Joshua said. "I have told you my desires. Can you satisfy them or no?"

The man Valdes' eyes lost all expression. But a shadow of contempt crept upon the corners of his mouth.

"A clever footman could get you what you want. The minor nobles are dolts; half of them have spent their substance on the whores of the Palais-Royal and the gaming-tables of the town. They sink so low that like that Jean du Barry they hire out their own women for a handful of money. A pretty enough little estate abutting on the property of your Mme. de Saint-Florentin's husband is for sale at this moment. M. de Monteynard, the owner, first lost the monies he borrowed on it at gaming and next in his cups observed that, if things were right, the King would be forced to abdicate, the chancellor to hang himself and the Duc d'Aiguilleme to take poison. Needless to say he is safe in the Bastille."

"Get me the house, man! You use too many words." Joshua's heart was on fire. Truly it seemed as though his bosom could not contain it.

He saw the sudden extreme sharpening of that bony face which seemed to turn into a knife. He added: "Yet do not think that I pursue the lady you speak of. I have quite other purposes. I need a peaceful retreat. I need—"

Valdes rose to his feet.

"Enough, Monsieur Jean de Vidal. Was not that the name? Vidal! Did you not say that you knew Provence? Was not the Chevalier of that name to be a native of Aix? You are young and imprudent. Did not your grandfather Isaiah Vidal cause to be printed at Avignon the prayers according to the rite of the four holy communities of the county of Venaissin? Did he not?"

Now for the first time Valdes laughed with a touch of mirth while Joshua felt himself grow pale and cold.

"It matters not," he said and his voice sounded tight even to himself. "Let us stick to the affair in hand."

Valdes came a step nearer.

"Directly. There will be no trouble. You will not be cheated. But do you remember the regulations of the community of Carpentras? We were permitted by our elders to dress like gentiles when we went on journeys. 'Twas twenty years since I went on such a journey. I went to Italy. I did not go back."

Joshua looked at the man before him with other eyes. Slowly he asked: "How have you fared?"

"Ill. The money I stole from my brother was soon gone. I became a strolling player and often starved and was whipped. I nearly fell into the hands of the Inquisition in Pisa and fled to Rome where, to avert suspicion, I became a soldier."

"You told me you were a colonel in the Pope's Guards."

"I rose in the service. 'Twas easy. For the officers were stupid as well as thievish. Being known to keep sober I was hired to spy for the Ambassador of France."

Joshua's heart turned against the man. Nevertheless he said: "Then how have you fared so ill?"

Valdes' face grew visibly dark.

"Because it is an ill world. The priests are without belief and the rulers without compassion; the peasants starve amid the grain they grow; men rot in hovels and the horses of the great are stalled in stables like palaces. Rogues and whores rule, and worth decays in prison."

"But a better age is coming," Joshua said. "Reason is beginning to prevail!"

The face before him now seemed to contract until it was like one of those huge gargoyle's on the roof of the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame de Paris—a face half demon and half evil bird of prey.

"A better age! Reason! You have read the pratings

of those who call themselves philosophers. Truly, a better age will come. It will come, as I told you, with fire. There will be burnings. There will be a scaffold set up high somewhere in the sight of a multitude and the heads of many who are now high will roll in the dust."

"God forbid," Joshua cried.

The other's face relaxed. He laughed.

"Perhaps the head of the Chevalier de Vidal will roll too. For it will be an evil day when it comes for the nobility and gentry. And you are young and will live to see this thing."

Joshua could have struck the man, he knew not why. He stood up.

"What will be the price of your services in the matters we have spoken of?"

"If you will be here one week from this day with one hundred thousand French pounds in coin of the realm, your coach will drive you to your house in Versailles."

"'Tis well and I shall be obliged to you."

Again Valdes laughed.

"Would you like to be introduced in some polite way to the Comte de Saint-Florentin?"

Joshua felt a pang of cold fear.

"You would not betray me?"

"I said that you were a foolish young man. I have opened myself to you, have I not?" And now Valdes laughed a most strange laugh, the laugh of one who has caught himself in a weakness and is amused at his own folly. "For I, on my part, was foolish enough to feel warm at speaking for the first time in many years to one of our people. So if we hang, we hang together; if we are scourged, it will be the same scourging."

Joshua lowered his eyes.

"I see that you want the introduction," Valdes continued. "I must warn you, however: it will be from the people of the Duc de Choiseul who are no friends of the Du Barry woman and are therefore likely to fall out of favor with the Court."

"I care not," Joshua cried. "I shall be here at the appointed time!"

He fled from that dwarfish sinister man. He needed to put a great distance between them. So there were others who had escaped the Jews' street and the Jews' quarter! But they were rogues and vagabonds, and so their example was not, God forbid, to his purpose. They thought of no new age of light and liberty, of no common humanity in which Jew and Christian would mingle and be good and free. They did not know that man was originally good and was warped into intolerance and hate only by superstition and the institutions that superstition had built. No light was on their foreheads. They had not read—he laughed in relief at the exquisite memory—the passage in M. de Voltaire's *Simple Soul* where the Huron from the wilds of America, having been touched by grace and determined to become a Christian, asks incontinently to be circumcised, seeing that in all the sacred writings of the Faith there was not a man who had a foreskin.

With that laugh upon his lips he entered his father's and his grandfather's house. It was very still in the house. That was a not uncommon thing. For his aunt, Tamar Pereira, was a quiet and devout woman, and so was her maid-servant from the Caucasus mountains. People came, indeed, for some hours every day to consult the Rabbi Ventura on questions of both custom and law. But these people entered by a private door and came with calm

reverential tread and demeanor. But on this day the stillness of the house smote upon Joshua Vidal and he wondered how he was to pass the days here before he could go back to the Rue de la Lune and set out upon his life's adventure.

It was well, indeed, that his father was not expected to return for many days from his long journey; it was well too that the great sum of money he would take with him in its small iron casket was his own; it was his inheritance from his mother that had been freely given him. An element of deceit and shame could not in truth be avoided. He was expected to use the money for his marriage and to increase it for his children and the community of Israel. Yet he was not too uneasy on that score. Did he not intend in this new time of the world, by mingling with that world, to help to bring a better and freer life to all Israel?

With a deep pang he wished that he could convince his grandfather of that! He stole one evening to the old man's door. But his hand that was about to be raised to knock fell at his side. There was no use. It was too soon or too late. They would take it for granted either that some inexplicable misfortune had befallen him or else that he had turned Christian and become a foe to his people. In either event they would sit mourning for him on the ground and slit their garments and pour ashes on their heads. The thing was a bitter thing to think of. He must not. He would not. He must not think of present grief and immediate confusion but of the day on which the ghettos would be destroyed and the people come out of their Jews' streets and alleys as free citizens in a free world. For that world he would work.

At first the days were stagnant. Then of a sudden in

the middle of the week they began to race, to melt, to flow like a rushing river. He had set all things in order. He had made all necessary notations in his father's ledger and placed all monies gathered in into his father's strong box. Was that the day before yesterday or was it only yesterday? For now it was today—an unbelievable today—on which at dawn in a hired coach he had driven to the Rue de la Lune, where after some delay had appeared, morose and silent, the man Valdes with the deed to a house and a huge patent of nobility on parchment apparently old and yellow. He had taken the great sum of money with a gesture of contempt. When, after the transaction, they had come forth from the house the coach-and-four and coachman and footman had been waiting, and Joshua Vidal had entered the coach, and the horses had clattered through the streets, soon to emerge from the city and run, as it appeared to Joshua, on winged feet on the road east to the King's town of Versailles.

Chapter Six

HE ARRIVED after nightfall. The horses had needed a long midday rest. Twice he had urged the postillion on. No speed seemed swift enough; the woods and fields did not fly fast enough. It was not that he was so feverish to reach his goal. He desired to savour to its utmost the sensation of flight and the fire of freedom. Dark, dark behind him lay suddenly at last the Jews' street and the tall dim house with its smell of ancient crumbling bindings; far, far into a faint unreal light faded the images of his youth: the walls and palace of Avignon; the burning Ghetto, white with dust; the famous bridge over the broad Rhone. How had he ever escaped and made his way to this cool, free speeding down the innumerable avenues of trees into a new world and life?

He would have been hard put to it to tell. Step by step he had unwound the strong invisible fetters. An image came to him—had he actually seen the thing or not?—of a bird at the time of migration in autumn perched on a village spire. It spreads its wings, it is poised for flight; but its small feet cling to the stone. It flutters up but returns. It flies a short circling flight but alights once more. It is still, even though its small heart must

be quivering. Then suddenly, swift, strong, unerring, it soars into the blue infinitude of the southward sky.

The house that was now his own was dark. But all the windows were golden with the many candles lit within. He sprang from the coach and entered, and was received by a tall emaciated red-headed fellow with a narrow, feeble face, half-fox, half-bird, who declared that he had been the major-domo of M. de Monteynard who, good man, had been a kind master, whom he prayed God and His Saints to protect in his misfortunes! He said that his name was Olivier, a poor honest man who had come near starving through these mishaps, and he begged the Chevalier de Vidal to retain him in his service, especially seeing that his wife Jeanne was a notable cook who was even now serving in the dining-room a bird and a bottle for the new master after his long journey.

“’Tis well,” said Joshua. “We shall see.”

He felt strong and light-hearted. He knew suddenly that he was glad to see Olivier, for certainly the man was no creature of Valdes. Neither was Pierre, the footman on the box, whom he now bade bring in and carry to his bedchamber the iron-hooped and brass-nail-studded chest of money and valuables. He was not so sure of the coachman, a man with a flat equivocal face and small yellowish eyes who spoke French strangely and called himself Grégoire. He drew himself up. He would get rid of the fellow. A new sense of power throbbed in him like a living pulse.

Olivier begged permission to lead the way up the polished winding stairs, with its white bannister and gleaming mahogany rail, to a spacious bedchamber, with huge canopied bed and wide flower-sprent Sèvres basin

into which the man poured water from the jug for his new master's ablutions. Discreetly he opened the door of the closet that contained the commode, the movable "*chaise percée*." Then he withdrew.

Now at last Joshua permitted to well up in him the thought he had treasured all day in the obscurer depth of him: he was now near to Marguerite. Those eyes saw daily the house in which he stood; those feet trod the near-by earth; those lips had doubtless spoken of the misfortunes and follies of M. de Monteynard, the near neighbor, and perhaps of the fact—if she already knew—that the house would be empty no longer. He ran down the stairs. He found Olivier at the foot. The major-domo conducted him to the dining-room which was not large, but beautiful with mahogany of mirror-brightness and carved sconces adorned with prisms that tinkled faintly as he trod to the table.

Now came his grey moment. He was little accustomed to wine; the food was unclean. How had the fowl been killed and dressed? He knew how unworthy of a philosophic mind these considerations were! All enlightened minds rejected the notion of special revelation. The very existence of a God was a question to be decided by the reason. And M. de Voltaire, hateful as was his tone, had pointed out the undoubted fact that many codes of law preceded those of Moses. Was humanity to be forever separated into hostile groups by believing old and arbitrary regulations to be divine and binding? It was sheer folly. Besides, there were the mildly inquiring eyes of Olivier wondering at the new, young master's lack of appetite. Joshua tossed down a glassful of the heavy red wine of Beaune; then quite deliberately another. Warmth rolled through the current of his blood; a faint agreeable

mist dulled his eyes. He was hungry. He tasted the cold fowl and found it excellent. He was careful, however, to keep his blood warm and his eyes misty; for at least once he almost gagged. Presently he found himself with elbows on the table and his head on his hands. The bottle was empty. He tried to rise and a weight pulled him down. Olivier was at his side, evidently accustomed to such offices. For soon Joshua was upstairs and somehow was undressed and clad in a cool long shirt of linen and his head felt the equal coolness of a night-cap. He was slid between fragrant sheets and knew no more.

Morning came with broad sunshine in his chamber and a dull feeling in the back of his head. But Olivier appeared with the rare drink of coffee in a cup of Sèvres porcelain and with pleasant bobbings up and down of his birdlike head.

"The fountains will be playing today, Monseigneur, and a crowd is coming from Paris. The Comtesse du Barry has now been formally presented to the Court. 'Twas no easy matter, hee-hee-hee." There was a tinge of obsequious malice in the man's laughter. "But His Majesty is pleased. Doubtless, Monseigneur will want to see it all."

"They said at Paris," Joshua observed, glad of the possession of this bit of gossip, "that the King broke his arm."

"Hee-hee-hee-hee!" Now the malice was obvious. "His Majesty fell from his horse. Undoubtedly. But he did so, as I overheard M. le Duc de Choiseul say with my own ears, out of sheer cowardice and then, hee-hee, pretended to have a broken arm. And so, of course, they treated him for a broken arm."

Joshua did not know whether to chide the man or to laugh with him.

"I am told," he said, "that I have agreeable and distinguished neighbors."

Olivier's head bobbed vigorously.

"Without question, Monseigneur. The Comte de Saint-Florentin is a very great gentleman, as well as a Minister and Councillor of State, a poet and a philosopher. He was a friend of my former master and wrote a set of most elegant verses in praise of this house and its grounds. I am not an educated man and do not read books of verse. But I heard M. de Monteynard quote some lines which went as follows:

"Ah, 'tis philosophy alone

Can make true happiness be born."*

Joshua jumped out of bed. His heart was ringing.

"Is the Comte de Saint-Florentin hospitably inclined?"

"Indeed yes, Monseigneur. My friend, his major-domo, in fact asked me to tell him of the exact arrival of the Chevalier de Vidal, since the Comte had been apprised of your settling here by the Duc de Choiseul."

Joshua laughed. The infernal cleverness of Valdes!

"And have you done so?"

"I sent Pierre with the message half an hour ago."

"Is he back?"

"Not yet, Monseigneur."

"I shall dress," Joshua said, "and view the grounds."

He thought to get rid of Olivier. But the man filled the wash-basin, fetched Joshua's garments and stood, as it were, at attention. Joshua moved heavily and shyly

* Saint-Florentin of course wrote:

*Ce n'est que la Philosophie,
Qui fait naître le vrai bonheur.*

under these strange eyes. What if the man saw the mark of the Covenant upon his flesh. He swore to himself that he would not endure that mildly prying glance again. He hurried.

"I need the morning air," he said, "and to see the grounds. Tell me when Pierre returns."

He almost leaped down those elegant winding stairs and out of the door. He had seen but dusky shadows of massed shrubbery the night before. Now he beheld a sloping garden laid out in flower beds, square, conical, lozenge-shaped, in nice symmetrical precision, surrounded by a hedge of well-clipped yew trees of a little more than a man's height. At the far end, the yew trees opened on a green path which led or seemed to lead—for the vista was dim and mysterious—to a grove of poplars that were swaying lightly in the morning breeze.

Joshua passed lightly by the unfamiliar flowers. It was the green path and the dim vista that took his eye. He entered it and found that here the designer of the garden had sought an effect of wild forest scenery. Moss-covered boulders edged the path; rude stone steps diversified it. Suddenly it turned sharply and revealed a tiny circular fane, the little cupola resting on Ionic columns, unfluted, cool and plain. A stone bench stood at the base of the little temple. Joshua lifted his eyes and saw the inscription graven into the stone "A LA REVERIE." One was to dream here, to dream with open eyes. He sat down on the bench. The strangeness of the world came over him. He knew of study and prayer and conversation and business. That one should invite the idleness of day-dreaming, was new to him. Too imminent in the Ghetto for any such notion were two forces: God, who was to be served; man who was to be feared. This garden was a

place where there was no fear. People had planned this spot for the free activity of the soul, untroubled by the contentions and hatreds and needs of the world. It reminded Joshua of the airs of the great Rameau, of which he had heard bits and passages now and then, of that grave, sweet, untroubled music, melancholy—if melancholy at all—only because beauty passes and man dies, wholly innocent of the miseries of earth, of cruelty, of need, of homelessness. Deeply he breathed the sylvan air. His eyes tingled with tears. His young heart glowed with love for this new world in which he found himself, for which, guided only by the pages of books, he had longed so deeply—longed, he hoped, not only for himself but for his people cramped in their alleys with their eternal prayers and ceremonies and their haunting terrors. Here was freedom; here was the free play of the human soul!

He heard footfalls upon the path. Pierre stood before him bearing a large folded missive of heavy paper. Joshua took it and unfolded it quickly. The Comte de Saint-Florentin in a tall, heavily shaded, elaborately curled handwriting welcomed to his new country-retreat, worthy of Epicurus, the Chevalier Jean de Vidal, who, he confidently hoped, would accompany him that afternoon to the promenade of His Majesty where many great personages would doubtless be seen. He signed himself M. de Vidal's obedient servant. Joshua arose. A small terror, to his own astonishment and grief, began to burn in his vitals. Would he not see Marguerite, speak to her, hear her? He knew, nevertheless, why he was afraid. It came to him. It was the inexplicable ease with which he was permitted to approach the goal of his desire. Would he not suddenly be stripped of all his false pretensions and marked as the intruder and the outcast that he was?

Olivier, serving him a light repast of omelette and salad which Joshua had ordered, bobbed his red, bird-like, beaked head even more than the night before.

"Very great doings, Monseigneur. The first royal promenade at which Madame du Barry will accompany the King. That means a triumph for the Duc d'Aiguillon and is not equally pleasant for the Duc de Choiseul and his party to which, as I humbly understand, Monseigneur belongs."

Joshua listened carefully. A sudden encouraging understanding came to him.

"It is well, then, for the Duc de Choiseul to increase the number of his partisans."

"Assuredly, especially by men of wealth. For, as I heard one day, when I was helping to serve a great dinner at M. de Saint-Florentin's, the King has been most sharp with the Duc. 'You are satisfactory in your office,' His Majesty was pleased to say, 'but be careful not to take bad advice in regard to Madame du Barry. She's pretty and she pleases me and she has nothing against you. The outbreak against her has been disgusting. This is my opinion. See to it that I need not repeat it!'"

"Then, of course, you know Madame de Saint-Florentin?" Joshua asked, and at once felt a hot, stinging sense of shame at having asked the talkative inquisitive serving man. But Olivier continued his tranquil bobbing of the head, more than ever like a bird picking worms.

"She is very beautiful, Monseigneur, but very quiet. Her father has a very poor estate in the harsh mountains of Auvergne. Except for a year or two with the ladies of the Sacred Heart, Madame was brought up no better than a peasant, according to what I have been told."

Joshua arose. "Will I need the coach?"

Olivier did not look up. "No, Monseigneur. Since, as I take it, you are invited, you need but go the three steps to your neighbors' who have a very grand coach, indeed."

The hours of waiting were both empty and full of small fears. Now that he was about to approach the flame by which his whole being desired so strangely to be burned he had an impulse of flight. It was a mere delusion to have thought that Marguerite's eyes had melted irresistibly into his own that night in the Tuileries; it was blind folly for him, Jehoshu'a ben Mordecai Vidal of the yellow-hatted tribe of Avignon, to suppose that he could escape unnoticed, unchallenged into the world of Christendom. A moment's nostalgia seized him for his father's counting-house, for the musty odor of books in his grandfather's study, for the fervent voices of the men in the synagogue. Yet, even while these feelings alternately chilled and heated him, he clad himself in his finest coat of sea-green taffeta, his breeches of black satin, an embroidered waistcoat and shirt of Brussel lace and donned a tie-wig with three tight curls on either side.

He lingered in his room. Fragments of prayer drifted through his mind, as well as sentences from his French books. The sunlight of early afternoon fell in and seemed to him of a cruel brightness. He tried to capture the image of Marguerite in his soul. It faded and dissolved. At last he went down the stairs and out into the open, and left his garden for the small dusty path that led to the great grilled iron gates of the estate of Saint-Florentin. The gates were open and, oddly alone and stripped, accompanied by his tall faint shadow, since the sun was behind him, he made his way down the long avenue of stately poplars that led to the broad stairs of the terrace.

The small elegant chateau, built in the style of the last age, reminded him with its tall first story and quite low second one, with its great windows and exquisite towers, of that of the great Prince de Condé at Chantilly, which he had once seen when journeying with his father. He lifted his eyes and saw that the Comte and Comtesse and one other lady were already on the terrace, doubtless waiting for the coach.

He took off his hat and bowed low before mounting the stairs to the terrace, as he had seen the cavaliers of Paris do. With dry mouth and audible heart he bowed again before the three on the terrace and heard with relief the self-satisfied voice of Saint-Florentin.

"Our new neighbor. Welcome among us, Monsieur. The Chevalier de Vidal, my wife and Madame the Comtesse de Moncrif." He gave Joshua no chance to speak nor to do more than lift his eyes to the great head-dresses with ostrich plumes and jewels of the ladies. "You have done wisely, Monsieur, to exchange the clamor of the town for the retreat that you have chosen! It is small and modest but fit for a philosopher. Ah, what a burden to me is this great house and my duties at court!" He turned to the small stoutish pink-faced Comtesse de Moncrif. "You have heard me bewail that often enough, Lisette."

"I am honored by your approval, Monsieur," Joshua said.

With sudden courage he looked at Marguerite de Saint-Florentin. Her blue eyes were soft but veiled. They had almost an unseeing look. He thought her pale under the obvious flush of rouge. Yet he drew a breath of relief. He was here. He was in her presence. He was an accepted guest and neighbor.

"Here comes the coach. The rascals are late!" shouted the Comte.

Joshua, beside Marguerite, asked her softly: "Do you also approve of my house and garden, Madame?"

"It is charming," she said and smiled shadowily but with lowered eyelids.

The carriage drew up. They entered. The gentlemen sat facing the ladies. Saint-Florentin breathed heavily. He held his huge belly with his hands.

"I'm sure, Monsieur de Vidal, that you know my sentiments since you know those of the Duc de Choiseul. I yield to no one in my reverence for His Majesty. The whole world knows that. I have compared Louis to Jupiter in verses that may perhaps, as Horace said of his own, not wholly die. Now it is true that Venus was born of the foam of the sea; she need not be the scum of the gutter."

The coach gave a great bump. Madame de Moncrif lifted a warning finger. They were surrounded by a crowd on foot, in coaches, in sedan chairs. It was the moment to stop and alight and enter the gardens of the palace.

Joshua had never seen the palace and its terrace and the gardens of Versailles. Entering by that gate at the left of the great terrace, he had at first but a glimpse of the dark box-hedges and white statues at its right. Nor had he time to let his eyes rest on that scene. For, as guests of Saint-Florentin, the four were permitted to ascend the terrace and join a great, gay, glittering group which stood in serried ranks behind the King, Madame du Barry and a small company of the greatest nobles and ladies of the Court. Yet was the terrace not so crowded but that Joshua could see beyond it and behold the silvery jets of the innumerable fountains rising

and plashing back into the sculptured basins, but that he could see the infinite vista between olive-hued hedges of the long central water—the vista that runs to the magic unknown ends of the fabled earth.

He gazed and, at the same moment, felt a gentle breathing at his side. A subtle warmth, like the faint warmth of a sunset ray, glided insensibly into his being. He dared not stir for fear that that warmth would fade.

He heard the voice of Saint-Florentin: "I must go to kiss His Majesty's hand."

He heard the bustling feet go forward. He heard the tired tone of the Comtesse de Moncrif: "I hope it will not last too long. I am tired of these Court ceremonies."

The warm ray seemed to come closer, to penetrate more deeply. At last Marguerite spoke: "They are so tiresome! But is not this whole life of the Court tiresome?"

Joshua closed his eyes, despite the magnificence of the vision before him, and his whole being shook. He trusted blindly that he trembled only within. For a slender, strong, delicate hand slipped warmly, tenderly into his own.

Chapter Seven

JOSHUA VIDAL was in great trouble. His knowledge of both the heart and the world was small. He had desired, above all things, that this arrow should pierce to his vitals. He had had no way of estimating the pang. What he experienced was not that great game of elegant sensuality which was the notorious fashion of his time and country, that "*amour galant et francais*," as Voltaire called it. What Joshua felt was a passion akin to adoration, intense, tender, generous, justly jealous. His imagination was suddenly crowded with all the details of the pageantry of the amatory life of Paris, with all the scandalous anecdotes of that "armed gazetteer" which made its way from the Dutch printers to the stalls on the Quai des Augustins. A few months ago he had, though not without some terror of conscience, rejoiced in this great dance of life that seemed to him in some sort free and in the sunshine. He had even snatched a few of its bitter-sweet delights. Now darkness and anguish fell upon it at the poisonous thought that Marguerite was also a *femme galante*, another in that rout of nymphs and satyrs, and that her fancy for him—if it was even that—was a thing light and transitory.

It had been bitter enough to think of her subjected to the demands of her husband. Yet somehow that sting had been less; for Joshua had fancied her shuddering or indifferent. Now his furiously resisting imagination was filled with the images of lovers, young, strong, desirable. Burning with shame, mad to know and wincing at the shadow of knowledge, he not unskilfully led the loquacious Olivier to the subject of the Comtesse. Olivier bobbed his narrow red head but sightly. It was not an exciting subject.

"She is, with all due respect, an ignorant girl from the country, as I told Monseigneur. Perhaps the Comte—hee-hee-hee—married her because he was no longer certain of his own charms. The late Comtesse cuckolded him, no doubt. But, being younger and less fat, he revenged himself in kind and scorned nothing from Madame de Moncrif to a milkmaid. Now he has retired to his estate and to the present Comtesse. It is said that he is very jealous of her and guards her strictly."

Wave after wave of joy rolled through Joshua's breast. Once more the sun had light, food had taste and the flowers fragrance. Once more he was agile of limb and soul. Once more he could rehearse in his mind the magic feeling of that hand within his own, the fiery ichour that issued from it and rolled through his whole being, her constant melting nearness to him throughout the promenade with the Comte, often engrossed by Madame de Moncrif, bustling self-importantly along upon her other side. He had not felt the weariness of the long procession. He had crooked his arm and once or twice she had laid her hand on it. They had not spoken much. "I would like to travel," she had said. He had replied that he too had not seen much of the world. A few cities of Pro-

vence. Rouen. That was all. She said that she was not fitted for the life of courts and he had, of course, confessed that this was his first glimpse.

On the short drive back, the Comte had talked. He did not think that the King, his arm still bandaged, looked either well or contented. The Du Barry woman was undoubtedly beautiful, with her fair skin and subtle sea-green eyes. Yet it was scandalous that she should bedizen herself at once with so many hundred thousand livres' worth of diamonds. A friend, by the way, had whispered to him the latest anecdote to the effect that the whores of Paris had sent a petition to Madame du Barry containing so many complaints against the chief of the Paris police that that official had been forbidden to so much as set foot into a bordello. The Comte had laughed. Marguerite had had, Joshua could have sworn, a hurt look in those long blue eyes of hers and the various interpretations to which this look could be subjected had not been among the lesser torments of Joshua's mind. He had taken his leave at the terrace of the Comte's house. He had been assured that he would soon receive another invitation. Marguerite had given him her hand but had averted her eyes. And that had been a hard thing to bear. For perhaps it meant that she regretted and, as it were, withdrew the kindness that she had bestowed.

Five days had now passed since that afternoon of the King's procession, and life went ill with Joshua in yet other ways. He was not used to idleness; he was not used to purposelessness. He had dreamed of leaving his father's house and Hebrew ledger in order to assert a new kind of liberty and help save the world. Instead, he sat in a charming room with a few books that he had found there

and a few other newer ones that he had caused to be fetched from Paris. He read, but what he read did not bite into his mind as every sentence had done in the days when he had had to hide the heathen books as things dangerous and forbidden somewhere in his desk or even in his bed. Or else he sat on the stone bench by the little temple in his garden and he found to his own astonishment that, though love may make deeper a man's heart, it makes narrower his life, since it ties him in time and place and makes all other preoccupations appear to be without taste or tang or profitableness.

Three more days passed before a message came from the great house next door. Then came two more days of waiting before the appointed evening arrived on which he was bidden to an intimate supper and went with blended ecstasy and terror and was at first dazzled by the interior of the chateau which he had not yet seen. The torches in the dining hall were golden, the footmen were in liveries of scarlet velvet piped with gold, the chandeliers were of rock-crystal; marvelous groups of Sèvres and Dresden porcelain caught Joshua's eye and took his breath away with their elaborate strength and delicacy. Three gentlemen and four ladies beside himself were bidden to the feast. Madame de Moncrif either had no husband or preferred his absence. The other two couples were the Marquis and Marquise de Paulmy and the Comte and Comtesse de Brionne.

The small, plump Lisette de Moncrif with a light touch took possession of Joshua.

"You are to take me in to table, so we might as well talk. These people are grand personages but very dull."

"I am honored," Joshua said, "but you will find me dull too."

"That is to be seen. But I shall begin, seeing how young you are, by giving you some advice."

"I hope I shall profit by it."

"You must not gaze with such intensity at Marguerite."

He waited to reply and saved himself from the stupidity of mere denial.

"She is very beautiful," he said as calmly as he could.

"She is pretty in her simple country-bred way. Nevertheless, be prudent. The Comte is—how shall I put it—determined to be jealous. That is, at least, the rôle he chooses at present—"

The major-domo announced that Madame was served. The dazzling dininghall and table now took possession of Joshua's senses. He was seated between Lisette de Moncrif and Madame de Brionne, a thin, gaudily dressed but subdued woman who at once began to eat voraciously. He heard the host's voice and heard his name and listened.

"I have always said," the Comte had begun, "that just as the heart has no other spontaneous language but truth, so candour and equity, liberty, peace and innocence dwell in the groves and woods and fields. Our friend the Chevalier de Vidal has also chosen to dwell in this charming countryside. The spirit of liberty, above all, does not reside in cities. Crowds surround you; people sit in judgment on you and, as M. de Voltaire once said to me with his accustomed eloquence and grace: 'Men certainly do not deserve to be made the judges of our conduct nor that we should let our happiness depend on their way of thinking.'"

Joshua looked up.

"You know that great man?"

Saint-Florentin waved a fat hand.

"We have been close friends for many years. On each New Year I send Voltaire congratulatory verses from my humble pen and he replies. And I think I may say that, as a philosopher, I treasure that friendship at least as much as I do the benevolent kindness shown me by His Highness the Elector Palatine and by the King of Poland and the Duc de Lorraine and Bar."

Paulmy, a man with a long, ironic countenance asked, "And our Duc de Choiseul? Don't leave him out!"

Saint-Florentin's eyes grew hard. They looked as though no light could enter them.

"Choiseul knows my entire loyalty. But let us not talk politics. I hope to be remembered by posterity for having been the friend of Voltaire."

Paulmy laughed. Brionne, a small middle-aged coarse-looking person, grew a little red.

"You forget your station, Saint-Florentin, by setting so much store by scribblers. Wasn't that fellow Voltaire banished for blasphemy? Do you hold with blasphemy?"

All but Brionne and his wife, who continued to chew, laughed. Joshua heard Marguerite's small deep laugh for the first time. He suddenly felt free and at ease.

"Ideas are changing rapidly," he said. "M. de Voltaire was pursued and banished by the intolerant and cruel."

He was astonished at his own temerity. He knew, without seeing, that Marguerite's eyes were upon him.

Saint-Florentin drew himself up.

"My dear Brionne," his voice was magisterial, "all the greatest gentlemen of the age, including the illustrious Frederic of Prussia, are philosophers and friends of liberty, even as were those great men of antiquity compared to whom we are but as village fiddlers to the musicians

of the Opera. M. de Vidal is right. New ideas are changing the world. I do not say that all men are yet fit to entertain those ideas; it may be well enough for the priests to influence the rabble. But M. de Voltaire is greater by the pettiness of the enemies who attacked him."

The footmen removed the remains of the majestic *terrine* of duck. They refilled the goblets with a glowing Hermitage. Joshua had slowly taught himself to eat and even savor the meats of the gentiles; the names of the vintages of the Rhone had always been familiar to him. The golden-corded major-domo now entered with a huge pot of earthenware from which protruded a gigantic silver ladle.

Saint-Florentin discoursed briefly as the footmen served.

"What is more delightful than Nature! Grace, joy and mirth arise where Nature is. On that principle I have instructed my cook to serve us the country dishes of old France. These pheasants could have been roasted and adorned with their plumage. Instead they are boiled with cabbage and aromatic herbs. The goose, too, that follows is prepared as it has been for centuries by the women of Castelnau-déry. And after that we shall have only sweets and cheeses. Brief and light repasts are most conformable to Nature and conducive of health!"

Lisette de Moncrif tittered and half whispered to Joshua.

"Next, then, I suppose, we shall eat raw meat like the savages of America. Nature! He has always been a glutton for these heavy stews."

Joshua waved aside the interruption of his mood.

"Is it not true that man has become corrupt and cruel

by withdrawing himself from the simplicity and benevolence of Nature, Madame? Have you read the *Social Contract* of the great Jean-Jacques Rousseau?"

Again Lisette tittered.

"I have not. Everyone talks about him, I know. I am only a frivolous woman and I think it a pity that a handsome lad like you should trouble his head about these matters. Look at our little Marguerite. She passed her girlhood quite close to Nature. The manure pile was behind the paternal mansion. In spite of Gaston Saint-Florentin's belly and his monstrous stews, she prefers Versailles."

Joshua took the woman at her word and looked at Marguerite even more intently than he had done. She was wearing a light smile, a smile which, he could have sworn, she had taught herself to wear. At any moment the smile could have faded and left her countenance melancholy and alone. She was listening with that faint smile to the sputterings of M. de Brionne on whom the wine was beginning to tell. Joshua was impelled to look back at Lisette de Moncrif. Her round amiable face had tightened; her small grey eyes were hard with malice. She had not expected his sudden glance and melted into artificial charm and sprightliness.

"Is she not lovely, our Marguerite?"

He could not answer, for a violent dispute arose between the Marquis de Paulmy and the Comte de Brionne on the subject of new taxes and imposts that were to be levied by order of the Duc de Richelieu for the armies of the King.

"They feed the *canaille* on chicken's wings," Paulmy cried, "and dress them in Holland cloth. Who pays for it all but the gentry and nobility of the kingdom?"

Brionne half rose.

"'Tis not a question of the recruits' food and uniforms. Do you want us to be defeated in the next war as we were in the last? We had not guns enough at Rossbach; we've lost ground to the British both in America and the Indies! I say the peace was a shameful peace and I say, philosopher or no philosopher, it was a crime to leave Frederic of Prussia master of the Continent."

Saint-Florentin interrupted. He, too, was now heavy with wine.

"I deny that the peace was shameful. And the monarch who said that in *his* realm every man could seek his salvation as seemed best to him will never abuse the power that has been placed in his hands. Let us drink to the great Frederic who, even while he combatted us in arms, paid immortal tribute to France by his divine verses written in our tongue."

They drained their goblets, even Brionne, who had forgotten for the moment all but the wine. Joshua, despite his moderation, felt elated. At last he heard from living lips what he had read only in books; at last he saw the dawn of liberty not only on the pages of philosophers but in the minds of men. He could almost bear, the repast being finished, the withdrawal of the ladies, since he hoped that this discourse would continue and soar to ever bolder heights.

But now there was brought in by the major-domo a huge bowl of steaming rum punch.

"I thought," said M. de Brionne, "that you were no friend of the du Barry woman!"

Saint-Florentin laughed.

"'Tis mere rumor that she introduced the taste for punch. The country is overrun with English customs

from the cut of our coats, the *fracs de roastbeef*, to the hours of our visits. Punch is the best of these."

Glasses were filled and the gentlemen, alone and unrestrained now, smacked their lips and opened their long waistcoats. No further philosophical or political observations were made. They noticed neither Joshua's abstinence from the fiery drink nor his observant silence. The hour of ease and anecdote and laughter had come.

Gigantic laughter arose. The footmen had gone and the men filled and refilled their steaming glasses. Paulmy unwound his stock and lace *jabot* and threw them on the floor.

"D'you hear of the young brute who beat the hell out of a whore that gave him the pox? 'You're a fine fellow,' said she, 'to beat me. I gave you what I had for nothing when my usual price is thirty pistoles.'"

A great sadness fell upon Joshua. He scarcely listened. Which were the real men? The men of the noble new sentiments or these tellers of anecdotes? For he had no experience of such a division as he saw here. The voice of Brionne almost droned. The other two began to be plagued with hiccoughs. The man evidently lived in Paris and frequented the Opera and knew tales of dancers and singers from behind the scenes. "Mlle. Vernier had to ask for leave of absence on account of pregnancy. She's already accused twenty different men for bringing this misfortune upon her. And you should have heard the quarrel of those two furies Le Doux and Sarron! They called each other thieves, strumpets, liars. Each flung at the other the same accusation of pandering to the unnatural lusts of both men and women. Then they flew at each other with claws and teeth!"

Saint-Florentin leaned against the ample back of his

chair and snored. His fat face trembled and his belly heaved. Paulmy dropped his head on the table. Brionne looked stupidly about. His eyes met Joshua's. He half rose.

"You don't like my stories? God damn me, Monsieur, you have the audacity not to like my stories?"

He slid back in his chair. He drained the contents of the half-filled glass before him. His spurt of anger was forgotten. He wept. "God damned good stories." He fell back on his chair and with a great sickish gulp slid under the table.

Joshua got up and slowly walked from the room, across the vestibule, and out into the spring night. His forehead glowed from the few sips of wine that he had taken long ago and also from the fumes in that hot room. A gentle breeze was causing the slender poplars to sway against the star-sown sky; it cooled and healed him briefly in body. His soul was desolate. Could this be the world that he had sought, of which he had seen glimpses in the writings of the great sages of France? And was Marguerite part of this world? Where was she? What were her thoughts?

He needed to hide in darkness, to cover himself with the night. He descended from the terrace into the garden and slowly entered the avenue of poplars. But if he proceeded he would soon be upon the road and then in the house in which he lived, another house bright with candles and tense with a strange unhappy life. He left the avenue and loitered upon the grassy spaces that ran to a great clipped hedge of box. Approaching nearer to the hedge, he saw that part of it formed a labyrinth, that curiosity of the gardener's art. Slowly he approached it and with a little shudder, though he could see its issue,

entered in. There in the shadow of the high clipped bushes he saw a white, slight figure; he saw a white face against the darkness of the leaves and of the night. Arms in full white sleeves stretched out in a gesture of welcome toward him. He ran forward. He took those hands into his own.

"I have been waiting for you."

"How did you know that I would come?"

"I hoped it; no, I knew it. I knew it from the first."

She drew him a little toward her and he dared to put an arm about her shoulder.

"You saw me even that night in the Tuileries?" he asked. Now he was trembling.

"Oh, yes, I saw you. Did you not know? And I have been waiting for you ever since. Did you not come here for my sake?"

"For your sake only," he replied. "Everything has been only and alone for you."

She held up her face toward the starlight and her lips met his own.

Chapter Eight

THE thing was thus. The house and garden that Joshua Vidal had bought and the estate and chateau of the Comte de Saint-Florentin lay on a narrow country road that issued from the great post road leading from Paris to the gates of the King's palace at Versailles. Where it ended—westward amid outlying farmsteads—no one knew. The ruts were deep, bordered by banks of brittle dirt in summer, rivulets amid slithery mud-heaps in winter. The Comte's majestic carrosse shook like a lame, obese old woman whenever it traversed the few leagues from the chateau to the post road. Spring was the best time for the country road. The dust did not fly nor the mud quiver.

By night the country road and the gardens lay, save when there was a moon, in utter darkness. To be sure there was a handsome old wrought-iron lantern suspended over the Comte's gate; there was a smaller one that swung from a pole at Joshua's gate. But even when a stout candle burned in these two lanterns the small faint circles of light did not extend beyond an ell or two. Had Marguerite not been dressed in white on that fateful hour after the magnificent supper which her husband

gave—dressed in gleaming white, as Joshua dared to hope and finally to believe, on purpose—the lovers would never have found each other. A figure would be faintly visible on the grassy spaces. But so soon as it sought shelter in the thrice sable shadows of the trees, it vanished from mortal sight.

The garden and the park, moreover, were contiguous. Well-kept hedges, thick and unwithered in that never very severe climate, divided them. But bushes could be gently thinned and carefully bent back and two lovers, so long as they were unpursued and kept out of the rays that issued from the yellow lines of candle-light which framed the carefully drawn window draperies, could call the gardens and its privacies and all the night their own.

M. de Saint-Florentin, being one of the King's Ministers and Councillors of State had often to be at Court, often in town; though he sought to accomplish his errands quickly and leave troublesome matters to be finished by his servitor, half-clerk, half-advocate, a shriveled, musty avaricious man who called himself Maître Goulleau, yet he had to spend not a few days and even nights abroad. He left on guard at such times Lisette de Moncrif who, being an impoverished childless widow living in a small white house in the village of Versailles, was free to do his bidding. But Lisette who had been, as Marguerite knew by certain evidence, among the Comte's mistresses in past years, nursed a hidden, small abiding enmity against her former lover whose hospitality and friendly offices she was too poor to refuse, but whose interests she was more willing to neglect than guard.

Saint-Florentin, finally, had a high opinion of his

wife's virtue. He considered himself her benefactor; he might still have made a great match, had he been contented with a middle-aged woman of gallant habits. Instead he had chosen the well-born but poverty-stricken girl from the rude, ruined castle amid the gloomy crags and peaks of Auvergne. Mere gratitude, he thought, would keep her virtuous, as well as inexperience, nor least his habit of keeping her in the background and at home. He was still an inveterate inditer of verses to ladies great or gay. Being asked by a wit concerning his wife he answered with the quatrain:

“Friends, I shall guard me well
Ere Sylvia's praise I sing:
One boasts not of one's good,
Afraid of envy's sting.”*

Marguerite repeated these verses to Joshua with bitter animation on their second meeting. Their first had been brief. Lightly their lips had touched and their hands brushed. Her bosom had heaved in fear and haste. Wordless, with moist eyes, she had wanted to flee. But he had plead. And she, with a sudden momentary firmness, had told him that on the next night but one he might find her in the grove beside the little classic fane in his own garden. Here, then, engulfed in darkness, he had waited so long that the stars moved their places above him. At last he had heard the faintest

* Saint-Florentin was no poet even by the standards of that age. The curious reader may nevertheless like the original:

*Amis, je me garderai bien
De chanter ma Sylvie:
On ne vante jamais son bien,
Crainte qu'on ne l'envie.*

of footfalls. Next she was beside him and from a dark cloak and hood shone upon him the wonder of her face. She had sat down on the stone bench but had eluded his touch. Her eyes were bright with anger.

"He is in his cups again. He made Lisette and me sit with him. After his third bottle he became amorous but no longer knew whether he was touching her or me. Luckily, stupor overcame him. Lisette and a footman put him to bed. And tomorrow he will tell me again that I should be grateful to him."

Joshua took one slender hand which now she yielded to him.

"Why does he think you should be grateful?"

"Because he has made me a great lady and brought me to Court. And, indeed, I would not go back to the hardships and dullness of a country life. But this! Oh, when he married me he promised my father to help him repair the house and pay the heavy debts of what's left of the estate. He has not even done that. He is avaricious. And I was so ashamed before my father and my mother, and do you know what I did?"

"Tell me," Joshua urged her softly.

"I sold the diamonds and pearls he gave me to Jews! I had to seek them out, those nameless outcasts, in their dark alley."

An icy wind seemed to blow upon him.

"Were their dealings fair?" he asked out of a dry, hot throat.

"Yes and the Jew was not unkindly. But now I have not the jewels and I live in terror that he may discover their loss."

Joshua took her other hand. The two hands he held

quivered no more. They seemed to rest and to be tranquil in his own.

"Do you know that I love you?" he asked.

She looked up at him now and those blue eyes were suffused with tears.

"I think I have known it ever since that night in the Tuileries. Your eyes were filled with interest and sensibility, your face expressed sweetness and tenderness, your soul seemed shaken by passion. Who is this? I asked myself, this man who makes both charm and terror, both sweetness and alarm penetrate my being? I tried to forget you and yet, despite myself, I tried to remember too."

Gently she leaned against him now.

"I had never known love," he said, "and when I saw you I knew what love was. And you—at least you could not forget me?"

"No. Saint-Florentin thinks he is so clever and that he guards me so well. Yet a dozen of his friends have sought to lure me. To what? To a drunkard's bed. They prate of delicacy and have none."

She let herself glide wholly into his arms.

"I have always been lonely," she said.

"Not more than I," he replied. "And I have dreamed of a heart that would be mine and of a soul that would share my thoughts and hopes."

She looked into his eyes. "What are they?"

"The hopes I have learned from Rousseau and Voltaire and from my own fate and my own heart—the hope for a world of humanity, liberty, tolerance, a world less full of fear and hate."

"How right you are!" She clung to him. "Oh, I have heard men say these things but not as you say them."

"Perhaps they had not my need of them!"

His heart beat wildly at the dangerousness of his words. How would he explain them? But her hand had wandered to his bosom and had felt the wild beating within. She put her arms about his neck and drew down his head and for the second time in life their lips met. But this time there was neither fear nor haste between them and they let themselves sink deeper and deeper into the passionate enchantment of their closeness.

The constellations wheeled above them until a breeze came suddenly rustling through the branches overhead and the dark seemed to be suffused with something less and other than mere darkness. Marguerite drew away from him and sat erect. Her hands, crossed on her breast, held her dark cloak.

"I should tell you that Choiseul informed Gaston that you were very rich and might be useful. I do not know any more about that nor wish to know more. But you must be prudent. Call on Gaston and amuse him. Pay little attention to me, yet not too little."

"I shall do all that you command me to do and that is in my power."

She smiled again. "You will, I know you will."

He sought to touch her again. Fleetly she fled and soon the light tread of her feet could be heard no more.

Joshua remained in that place. He sat down on the bench of stone again. He watched the rosy edges of the sky grow bright with streaks of fire and then the rim of the sun's disk blaze through the trees. It took a long while for his blood to cool and roll less tumultuously through his veins. But even then he could not think or perhaps, as he told himself, dared not. Where was he? What was he doing? What was to be the outcome of

this adventure? He had thought, if he had thought at all, of passion and the play of sensibility. Something other and terrifying, he knew already, he knew now, had happened. He loved Marguerite with a love of which he did not know the name. He wanted to be with her forever, to shield her from all ill and hurt, to have that face, if it were sad, forevermore upon his breast, to have those eyes look forevermore into his own. And she? And she?

Light burst upon the world. He shook with the chill of the dew. Heavily he went back to his house for warmth and perhaps sleep.

But sleep, except for certain heavy hours during each day, was not the great concern of these two lovers. Saint-Florentin was pretty constantly abroad. Official duties called him, but he also let fall to Marguerite enigmatic remarks concerning a private piece of business which might ease the pressure under which he labored for want of money to sustain the style of living which he affected. He spent much time in the house of his confidential man Maître Goulleau in an unsavory part of Paris. Briefly at home, he was surly and reproached Marguerite for having brought him no dowry. He gave her bitter looks, taunted her with her coldness, complained of his health and lived on gruels and aromatic teas. Then with great eagerness he would be off again. Goulleau, as Marguerite had ascertained months before, provided not only shady ways of making money but wenches and wine. This circumstance, which had once wounded her, despite her lack of love for Gaston de Saint-Florentin, now gave her ease and peace.

For she and Joshua met almost nightly in the dark glades and darker groves, as spring melted into summer

and the blossoms of the apple, the apricot and the quince drifted to earth and small green fruits took shape. She told him all her tale, which she had been able to tell to none other. Oh, that he could have told her his own instead of implying shadowy circumstance and empty gesture! For they were both fugitives from the order and pattern of a world. Soon they were able to laugh together. " 'Tis true," she said, "about the dung heap behind our grand crumbling house. Only the peasant girls were better off than I, since the stench did not offend them. Nor did they freeze nearly to death in the harsh mountain winters as I did. For the only fire was often just the one in the huge fireplace in the great hall. And there my father sat, surrounded by his slaving, yelping dogs. For the hunt was his only pleasure. When he brought back a slaughtered boar he felt himself a gentleman and the worthy descendant of the Sieurs de Soubise et des Deux Ponts, who had once been cousins-germane of the kings of the House of Valois. There he sat before the fireplace drinking the sour country wine and letting the dogs gnaw the bones. My mother crouched in a corner as near to the flames as she could get. For twenty years she bore a child every other year and lost them all but me. Is that not sad? My father never loved her and I—I tried, I tried; it did no good. When the weather was mild I used to sneak away from work and climb to the only tower that hadn't crumbled. There was a mass of dank mildewed old books there which I dried by a sunny window, and I read and read. There was a book of stories in pigskin bindings—stories told by a group of ladies and gentlemen who fled from the Italian city of Florence to escape a pestilence. Ah,

they were sweet and gay, those stories. Have you heard of them, Jean?"

Sadly he shook his head. "My mother died early and my father made me read grave books."

"There were books by old sweet poets, too. At least I thought they were both musical and moving, Pierre Ronsard and Clement Marot. But Gaston tells me they were mere barbarous versifiers and that no persons of taste read them now because they did not observe the rules set down by M. de Boileau. What do you think, Jean?"

"Alas," he said softly, "I have heard those names. That is all. Of the books of the last age I know best the *Characters of La Bruyère*. 'Tis a book to read and reread. He knew men and the world."

She threw herself upon his breast.

"I do not like that kind of knowledge of men and of the world. Gaston is always quoting the maxims of the Marquis de la Rochefoucault. I detest them. I dreamed in my ruined tower of beauty and grace and love. I thought some day there would come a young gentleman—I think he looked a little like you, Jean—and carry me away from the stables and the dung heap and the dogs and even my lonely tower."

She wept a moment. Then she controlled herself and laughed, and the laugh was a bitter one.

"And you know who came, don't you? Gaston de Saint-Florentin with a hunting party. He saw me and I pricked his weary appetites and he bought me of my father for fifty thousand livres, which he never paid, and three casks of Burgundy, which proved as sour and raw as the wine of the countryside."

"And you consented to the bargain?"

"I woke up from my dreams and saw that I was like to perish in those wilds or marry a country oaf. I looked at my poor mother and thought of her life! And Gaston talked of all the beautiful things in the world—of liberty and generous sentiments, of the philosophy of M. de Voltaire and the divine strains of Rameau. He quoted his own poem addressed to that great man:

By god Apollo was he taught
And sings as well as does his master.*

"I had never heard such words from human lips before. . . . And now—and now! Oh, love me, Jean. You do love me, do you not?"

He held her very close. "I love you tenderly, deeply. I know not myself how much."

She looked into his eyes. "You have told me so little of yourself. It makes me sad."

His heart seemed to fail and he knew that his voice was little.

"My youth was passed among people of great goodness but who led very strict lives. And I also dreamed of a more beautiful world—a world with more liberty in it and more love." Now his voice gathered force. "And I believe in that world; it will come; it is perhaps already here. Men will return to Nature and to simplicity; they will remember that they are brothers; ancient virtues will be born again; ugly and cruel institutions will perish."

"How beautiful!" she breathed. Then she laughed a little. "Of course Gaston uses words very like yours. Only he doesn't mean them."

** Il fut instruit par Apollon;
Il chante aussi bien que son maître.*

The nights grew warmer and more warm. Yet one night, with the sweet astuteness of woman, she smuggled out of the house a great, thick silken coverlet filled with swan's down. It was to protect them, according to her, from the unwholesome dew of night. She came with her dark hair unpowdered and loosely held by a single pin; she shook her head at the small bangle of the new moon: "You are not big enough yet to be a betrayer." Her locks rolled down in exquisite disorder. He hid his face in them and clasped her in his arms and knew that she had come to him at last ungirdled, loosely clad. She said that she was a little tired and helped him spread their silken bed on the soft grass. She had to bid him who was shy with her to lie beside her. "Cover us both with the ends," she whispered. "A little space will do for us." Then she took his head in both her hands and drew it down upon her breast.

The moon waxed nightly. A sting of danger, not unpleasing, attended their meetings. He did not wholly share her delight in the triumph of her small stratagems; he winced at her sudden silvery hardness one night—she showed it once only at this period—when she compared the horned moon to the horns on Gaston's forehead.

"Let us flee!" he said, beside himself with love and a strange shame, and at once terrified by the wildness of his words. She did not answer him by speech that night but by the completeness of her yielding, the kindness and the ardor of her love.

And the enchantment grew deeper. They learned each other; they learned what neither had known: the foul wrongness of the world's notion that love declines when the first cruel sting is softened and the fever of mere curiosity is allayed.

"'Tis now," he said to her, "that our true love is born; I love you more on every meeting; I know not which grows greater—passion or tenderness. Did you know?"

"I knew nothing—nothing!" She clung to him. "I am virgin but for you, for you alone."

And the world fell from them; there was no earth nor any moon or stars. They were together and were one.

His days were drowsy when they were not filled with waking dreams. In his reveries he saw himself and Marguerite in flight. They would meet in Versailles and hire a coach-and-six; postillions who knew neither of them would be in readiness. They would change horses at town after town, and with a swiftness none had yet achieved make their way to Bordeaux. Thence they would take ship to the Indies of the West, to the new lands of a new world, where simplicity and peace and liberty had been native from the beginning. And he would build a house and Marguerite and he—how sharply the vision came to him!—would dwell in that cool house and walk under the shadows of the broad-leaved palms.

He was about to communicate to her these waking dreams when on a certain night she came to meet him in formal dress under her dark cloak and hood.

"Gaston returns within an hour to take his ease for a period at home. The letter came this morning. We must be on our guard."

A chill of loneliness crept icily into his being.

"What shall we do?"

"Call to pay your respects to him day after tomorrow morning. I shall find a way of giving you a message. . . . Ah, I have found it! I shall lay my ivory fan folded on

the lacquered table in the vestibule. A written strip will be in the folds."

The chill in him gave way to sudden extreme terror a terror that burned its flame into every fiber of him. Would she be forced to share the bed of Saint-Florentin? He dared not ask; he could not ask; he could not have endured either her silence or her affirmation. Torture for torture, an element of real or fancied uncertainty was best.

She felt the iciness of his hands.

"Do not be afraid; nothing has changed, nothing can change between us. Is it not so?"

"It is, it is!" he cried and desired with his whole soul that this cry of his be true. But the icy terror stood between him and truth.

Chapter Nine

THE Comte de Saint-Florentin received Joshua in his study. In a long lounging-coat of white, with deep green lapels, he sat at a huge beautiful desk. On its top stood an elaborate clock of Sèvres porcelain; two delicate nymphs, each holding a diaphanous veil, supported it; the hands were the arrows of the god of love. Books in brilliant bindings lined the walls. The fresh gold gleamed on the polished calfskin of their backs: exquisite duodecimos for the pocket, nobly gigantic folios of maps and colored plates.

Joshua expressed his pleasure at seeing the Comte well and safely home. He had determined to obey Marguerite and trust her wisdom; he had fought down a bitter rebellion in himself; he averted his thoughts from dreadful privacies. He thought of her in *his* arms.

Saint-Florentin was in an amiable, melancholy mood.

"I am weary and not very well. Ah, my young friend, our misfortunes stride apace; our consolations are slow and late!"

Joshua assented. "I am beginning to learn that too."

He almost liked the man at this moment despite the pompous belly and the falsely cherubic face.

Saint-Florentin sighed, or rather he inhaled and expelled the air through pursed judicious lips.

"Not that the world does not improve a little. I was in Geneva for three days; the manners of the Genevese have softened; they would no longer burn Servetus at the stake nor do they demand written confessions of Calvinism from their inhabitants."

Joshua's soul brightened.

"Such glorious changes make our individual ills easier to bear."

"Doubtless," Saint-Florentin half agreed. "Yet M. de Voltaire, whom I had the honor of visiting in his delicious retreat, was but ill satisfied. Philosophy has done too little to change intolerance or to affect the lives of men. Yet he said: 'the more evil men are, the more precious is virtue.'"

"How true that is!" Joshua exclaimed. "Yet such reflections as you exchanged with M. de Voltaire and such hopes as unite you would have been impossible in any other age. And I have been told—" how clearly he suddenly saw the thoughtful head of Cerfberr of Strasbourg—"that in Berlin, too, the new spirit of liberty and tolerance is on the march."

"Ah, under the great Frederic! But here, too—here too. I would whisper that today Jean-Jacques, our Jean-Jacques, is returning from exile under most noble protectors and will find refuge in a sylvan retreat not many leagues from here!"

"Where?" Joshua asked softly. "I shall not divulge the secret."

Saint-Florentin leaned forward a little.

"The present Marquis de la Rochefoucault has an elegant chateau and a most admirable park near the village

of Ermenonville. There, by quiet waters and in umbrageous glades, our Jean-Jacques will rest his wounded soul."

Joshua clasped his hands. How could he help being stirred. He himself had been reading the works of Jean-Jacques more and more. How deeply that great mind clove to the social root of human evils! How free and tranquil would be a world patterned after *his* principles.

"I revere Jean-Jacques," he said. "How he has torn the veils from our eyes and shown us the goodness and original freedom of man!"

Saint-Florentin nodded.

"How charming to discuss these things with a neighbor. For I must tell you to what my thoughts are turning."

"I shall be pleased to hear."

"You have no doubt observed," said the Comte crossing his ringed fat hands with self-satisfied benevolence over his vast middle, "that I inveterately and, as it were, despite myself, woo the Muses. Oh, it has been only to distract myself and to fill the voids left by more serious and useful occupations. For years a number of my friends have urged me to gather and publish what I have written. At last I have conquered my repugnance to the garishness of publicity and have yielded to their pleas. Since for the time being I have done my utmost in the service of my king and country, I propose to dedicate the next few months to this pleasing task."

"How charming," said Joshua, a little drily he at once feared. For he wondered at the long preamble. A sense born perhaps of hereditary suffering warned him that other matters than the printing of verses were in the wind.

"Ah, you approve!" Saint-Florentin breathed delicately. "From a man of your culture and breeding I would have expected nothing else."

Now Joshua was quite sure. He remembered the reputation for wealth which, as he had been told, he had been given. He contented himself with a nod of affirmation.

"And you would think, would you not, that I could dedicate myself to my task surrounded, so to speak, by the Graces and the Joys of the antique poets?"

"I would indeed. Why not?"

"Because, my young friend, as I wrote in a set of verses not, I trust, inelegant:

"Often success seeks out the man of hardened front
And rarely falls to modesty.*

"I have not known how to pursue my advantage. There is a heavy mortgage on my house and lands. I owe wages to the very servants. My wine-merchant clamors not unjustly!"

The hands fell. He leaned back. He closed his eyes.

"That is indeed deplorable," Joshua said slowly.

A hot wave of feeling akin to rage rose in his breast. Ah, how right was the divine Jean-Jacques concerning the iniquity of the laws of an artificial society which broke all natural rights and ground the hearts of men into the dust. Was it not detestable enough that this fat pretentious coxcomb owned Marguerite body and soul? All the forces of the State and of the Church would protect him in the utmost assertion of these iniquitous

* *Le succès sauvent pour le plus effronté,
Rarement pour le plus modeste.*

rights! And so—Joshua's gorge rose—he had to be bribed and pampered in addition. He was at least determined not to spare the man. He let the silence continue until it throbbed in the air between them.

Saint-Florentin opened his eyes slowly. A smile spread over his features, a smile that he tried to make charming and benevolent at once.

"The emoluments of my various offices are clear. They exceed my needs. I will also seek to retrench. I could pledge these emoluments—a part of them—for a number of years."

The hard eyes looked straight into Joshua's.

"How much do you need, Monsieur?" Joshua demanded.

The smile broadened. It was now light and deprecatory. "A trifle for a man of wealth. A mere hundred thousand livres."

This, Joshua thought, was the hour of his small revenge—and of Marguerite's.

"You are, Monsieur, of the party of the Duc de Choiseul and the Duc is the determined foe of the Comtesse du Barry. Is it not so?"

The smile faded. The eyes were blank and hard.

"It is so."

"Love is a powerful motive," Joshua said slowly. "A king is but a man. If the Duc de Choiseul were by any chance to be relieved of his offices and banished from the court, would he not drag you down with him?"

Now Saint-Florentin dropped his game of delicacy and elegance. His very body underwent a change. Doggedly he hunched his shoulders forward; his hands seemed to uncurl from their studied elegance of gesture. He struck the arm of his chair with his right fist.

"True. The damned whore may ruin us. I have taken my precautions. There is a matter on foot which, if it succeed, will fill my purse. Meanwhile, I need the hundred thousand livres. If the pledge of my emoluments seems insufficient, there are still my ancestral acres. I did not think to come to this."

He frowned; he grasped the arms of his chair. He stuck forward his suddenly brutal jaws. "Well, Monsieur? Must I plead?"

"Where are those acres?" Joshua asked.

"Being of the South you should be acquainted with the country. The farms are near the village of Dieulefît, fifty leagues from Montélimar. The land is good."

Saint-Florentin got up. His belly quivered. His face grew pink. He was not accustomed to being kept in suspense.

"Would you drive me to the Jews?"

Joshua laughed. He felt light and free suddenly, and filled with a sense of ironic power.

"I would not, Monsieur. For the Jews, since this is their only way of winning a livelihood, would charge you interest. I will not do so. All I want is the assurance that the capital is safe."

Saint-Florentin's hard eyes were fixed steadily on Joshua. He did not understand.

"You will take no interest?"

Joshua laughed again. He shook his head. "I am no money-lender. I would oblige you. I simply do not wish to lose so large a sum. Nor would you wish me to."

He, too, had now arisen. Saint-Florentin stretched out his hand.

"The old nobility of France still lives—in you, my young friend! This was the high and generous spirit of

our illustrious forebears. I shall instruct Goulleau to draw up the papers."

"Do so."

"And the cash will be ready?"

"It will."

The Count's large face became cherubic again. His very skin tightened. The hunched shoulders were straight with almost a swagger of dignity.

"Charming. I shall be no more afflicted. And you will give me your advice in the selection of my poor verses. Needless to say, the volume will be anonymous. Simply this: '*Leisure Hours*. By Monsieur de S.' The dedication will inform those who should know. It will be to His Most Serene Highness, the Elector Palatine. I was meditating the epistle dedicatory this morning. The first sentence will be admirable: 'The tribute of the Muses is due to the great of earth who protect them.' Do you not think that most fitting?"

"Altogether so," Joshua said. "Oh, altogether."

He was again impelled to laughter during the ceremonious leave-taking. Some spirit of triumph and adventure stirred in him. By good fortune there was no footman in the vestibule. An ivory fan lay folded on the lacquer table. Joshua looked about him. Delicately he began with one hand to unfold the fan. A strip of thin paper lay between the third and fourth folds. He closed his hand over it and hastened out. Not until he was alone in his chamber did he read the dear words. Late, she knew not how late, on the next night but one he was to await her at their wonted trysting-place.

She was late even beyond his fears. And when she came she was white and shaken.

"Goulleau and his malodorous cronies were there.

There was business first, of which I heard little and understood less. Then they began to drink. But they chuckled so over their affairs that the wine took hold of them but slowly. At last they are all asleep."

He wanted to draw her to him. Suddenly she wept. "Do not touch me. I am defiled."

He understood and an icy stream seemed to roll through his veins and to congeal in his belly. "You shall not endure it and neither will I!"

She laughed a desperate harsh small laugh. "What will you do?"

"He has asked me for a loan of one hundred thousand livres. I will offer him more when that is gone. Encourage him to every extravagance! Bid him buy horses and jewels! Let him pledge me all he has left. Then let us face him and offer to release him from the indebtedness if he but let us go free."

She looked peeringly up at him.

"Where have you lived, my Jean? He could appeal to the Church. The King's confessor, as well as the Abbé Fleury, are among his friends. Oh, they would connive at gallant adventures. They would laugh at his being cuckolded. But they would hound us with all the monks and priests in the kingdom if I openly asked to be released or if we threatened to flee! The secular arm would be summoned by the Church."

"But does he not boast of the freedom of his thought? Is he not a friend and ardent admirer of M. de Voltaire whom the monks caused to be banished? Does he not speak tenderly of our Jean-Jacques?"

She shivered. "You do not understand. Such sentiments are in fashion, I know not why. So he repeats them. Perhaps he believes them so long as nothing in-

terferes with his comfort or his interests. I do not know. He is proud of knowing M. de Voltaire. But he is really prouder of a gold medal given him by the Elector Palatine. All he really cares about are the satisfactions of his vanity and his appetites. Of course he would summon the priests. He is too cowardly and old and fat to challenge you. And even if he did and if you killed him, Choiseul would see to it that you ended in the Bastille or Vincennes."

"So there is no place in the world for freedom or for love?"

"You are a philosopher and a dreamer, Jean. You are very strange and I think I love you because you are so strange. But things go by rules." She was softer of mood now. She leaned against him. "Do not grieve, my friend."

"How shall a man not grieve in a world so false and ugly? I gave up not a little, when I think of it now, to go out into the world; I even took some guilt upon myself."

"How strangely you speak again, Jean."

He drew her closer.

"I thought that I would find in the world some of the new goodness and the belief in freedom and nature that all the philosophers write about. I desired to be part of that new world and to help others be a part of it. But it seems not to be here yet, not to be anywhere except in words."

"It is in our hearts," she said.

"And so it must be in other hearts—perhaps in thousands of hearts. And some day all these hearts may know and recognize one another and destroy a few of these inhuman rules. But what are we to do?"

"We are to love each other," she said, and there was a great tenderness in her voice. "We are not to think too much of the bitter and ugly things. 'Tis my fault that you did tonight. I should not have let you. I was weak and foolish. Love me, Jean; love me!"

Never had their enchantment been deeper nor their souls closer. A common grief, a common sense of the tragedy of life, united them.

She said to him at parting, "You say that there is so much cruelty in the world. Very well. Then is it not a good thing that there should be love in the world, even if that love has to hide its head?"

"It is!" he cried. "In very truth it is!"

"Remember that," she plead. "Especially when you are bitter, remember that."

"I shall remember."

He tried very hard to remember her words. But a very storm of rebellion would from time to time arise within him. And this storm of rebellion would alternate with a nostalgia which he had never dreamed that he would feel—for the sun-flooded Talmudic school in Avignon where he had mastered more than one tractate which had seemed intolerably dull and out of step with the age and, indeed, still seemed so; for his father's parlor counting-house where there had been a dealing with reality so dry and sober that it had made him by turns furious and sleepy; above all, for the study and the voice of the Rabbi Ventura. Except for the element of family affection, this nostalgia seemed to him unworthy of his ideals both for himself and for the world. Yet he could not wholly escape it, except during the many hours in which his heart and mind were wholly absorbed by the thought and image of Marguerite, and the far fewer burning hours when he and his beloved met.

A few days after their conversation a footman brought him a huge packet from the Comte de Saint-Florentin. It contained innumerable verses: complimentary, amatory, fables, tales, epigrams, prologues, dance-comedies or ballets in verse. Accompanying the packet was a letter in which the Comte asked his approval of this selection from the fruits of the elegant studies of his leisure hours. He wrote that his chief reason for having his trifles printed was the urging of his friends. But, he added, there was still another reason. "One is annoyed to see the motto of immortality at the head of so many declamations which announce nothing eternal but the oblivion to which they are destined." He, at least, he protested, had written because the music and metre had always been in his soul. Nature is the strongest force. "The bee must make wax and the silkworm spin," he added in illustration. Joshua laughed at this and yet more at the sentences in which Saint-Florentin had plead that poetry was at least an innocent employment, seeing that "what makes and will always make the world a vale of tears is the insatiable cupidity of men and their ungovernable pride—from a Tamerlane, who knew not how to read, to a customs-clerk, who knows only how to figure." Joshua wondered at the apt and happy turns of expression and asked himself whether Saint-Florentin was not capable of having borrowed them from the epistles of some of his illustrious correspondents, perhaps the great Voltaire himself.

After the grandiose flourishes of the subscription came a postscript: "On Monday of next week I am inviting you to drive in my coach to Paris. We shall have supper with Maître Goulleau. We shall have ample space for a casket of gold."

Once more Joshua laughed.

Chapter Ten

THE roads were mired by heavy rains and the journey to Paris took Saint-Florentin and Joshua a long day and part of a night. Little speech passed between them. The Comte had acquired the habit of somnolence if not of sleep in his corner. His heavy body appeared to adjust itself to the swaying of the coach. Joshua was hard put to it to be patient. He examined with a cold curiosity the circumstances that had brought about this situation of his traveling to Paris with the Comte de Saint-Florentin and a casket of gold. He had fled to find or help to build a world more in harmony with Nature and the unspoiled instincts of man. He had rebelled against being a Jewish money-lender in a dark *Juiverie*, or Jew's quarter. He was lending money still. But he was a fine gentleman and was lending it without charging interest. But was he really a fine gentleman? For Saint-Florentin, who was not close-mouthed, had not been able to conceal the fact that Joshua's generosity was a thing unheard of and without parallel. Joshua was tempted to laugh at himself as a mere dupe. No, he was not that. For he could shut his eyes and see the face and tresses of Marguerite and feel her head close, close upon his breast.

They lay at an inn that night and toward noon repaired to the house of Maître Goulleau. It stood in an alley amid a tangle of other alleys so narrow that the coach could not enter. They went on foot across the jagged stones and, as they were seen to approach, there issued from the tall crippled rickety houses beggars, men and women and children, gaunt, filthy, horrible. Great open sores, and sockets without eyes, and heads without noses or hair; poisoned rags fluttered from loose bandages; hoarse voices cried for pity on so much wretchedness. "*Miséricorde! Je crie miséricorde!*" There was a creature, once human, that dragged itself behind them without legs; the dark clawlike hands advanced and the trunk gave a small thud. There was a female naked to the waist who pointed to a goitre so long and pendulous that she seemed to be a monster with three breasts.

"Do not run!" the Comte said quietly. "They have been known to attack."

He drew his small half-ornamental sword, at which the beggars kept their distance.

Joshua was sick at heart. A faintness came over him. "Would I had brought small coins to give them. You did not warn me!"

The Comte shook his head. "It would be a great folly. This is what sloth and vice bring upon men." He sighed. "Will a coin help them? The example of the prosperity of Virtue may help them more."

Joshua clenched his fists. A wave of rage threatened to overcome him. Saint-Florentin was himself slothful, cruel, lecherous, a miser and a prodigal in one. He prated of virtue and had no compassion upon these miserable creatures. Joshua ached to speak but he knew not in what terms nor where to begin, and tears of utter pity blurred his eyes.

At last, at last the Comte stopped and lifted the huge iron knocker of the grey door of a grey house which, with its tight-closed wooden shutters, looked itself like a blinded creature. The door was opened at once by a tall large-boned, red-eyed slattern who led them, wordless, into a dusty parlor at the back of the house which received light from a window giving on a muddy yard.

"Is your man so poor that he must live here?" Joshua asked.

The Comte laughed. "None knows how rich he is. Indeed, he is probably one of the richest commoners in the kingdom. Only he is a very Harpagon—the perfect miser as depicted by Molière."

Goulleau came in. He was dressed in a ragged lounging-waistcoat, with sleeves such as had been fashionable in the days of the King's grandfather. His stockings were held up by strings; his feet dragged because the slippers scarcely held together. His thin face wore an astute smile.

"I overheard the observations that Monseigneur was pleased to make. I call to his attention the fact that rumour is ever a liar. I am in truth a very poor man who tries from time to time to lay aside a pittance for his later years."

For once Saint-Florentin was dour. His blandness, like the lacquer of Japan, cracked into an hundred small fissures. His very voice was hoarse.

"Cease playing that detestable comedy! You have me in the hollow of your hand. How many beside me I do not know. I am putting myself under an obligation to the Chevalier de Vidal because I was afraid—that is it—I was afraid of being deeper in your debt."

Goulleau smiled again with his eyes on the floor. He raised his lids a little.

"Ah, Monseigneur—but sit down, sit down, gentlemen—you do me an injustice. I am, of course, thrifty as becomes a person of low birth, while great gentlemen cannot but live in a certain style. So it will happen that I have a little ready money from time to time. It is also true that I hold pledges and mortgages and deeds and could conceivably—" he stopped, he looked up, he chewed his gums for a moment like an old crone—"conceivably cause embarrassment to some very great personages." He stopped. He smiled again. "Even to Monseigneur, the Duc de Richelieu. But of what avail would that be?"

"Avail, avail? What do you mean?" Saint-Florentin asked.

"Ah, if a humble person like myself became too troublesome, how easy 'twould be to have him robbed of the written sureties and himself put in a very quiet place not many leagues from here."

Saint-Florentin laughed with relief.

"How true! Who should know better than yourself? For rumour has it that you have helped I know not how many wives and kept women to lock up in the Bastille their fathers or brothers or husbands. But have you the necessary paper? All this must bore M. de Vidal."

Goulleau got up. "The paper is ready. You have but to sign. I will not even charge you a fee. Times are changing, Monseigneur, as I told you before. The Six Corporations of the Merchants and Tradesmen of Paris require the services of an advocate." He turned. He looked peeringly into Saint-Florentin's eyes. "And that advocate should have some acquaintance with the great."

"The bourgeois have grown rich in these latter years, have they not?" said Joshua. He was surprised at the

sound of his own voice. But he had suddenly seen the image of his father before him; he had suddenly heard his father's dry and quiet voice: "The rise of the merchants and money-lenders may profit us. The nobles will always think of us as slaves."

Goulleau turned to him slowly.

"Only last month His Majesty issued an edict looking to a further improvement of the already flourishing condition of the commercial community. Today, it being June 22, letters-patent are being issued permitting even foreigners to take out the new licences created for the arts and crafts."

"Will those licences apply to commercial undertakings too?" Joshua asked.

"It is not so stated but it is presumed that they will."

Joshua's heart grew warm. Despite falseness in high places and dreadful misery among the poor, the new and better age was here. For if foreigners could trade and manufacture in the kingdom, then surely the Jews born in France would be able to avail themselves of these rights. The dark *Juiveries* would disappear; Jews would dwell near their shops or manufacturies; they would be as other men among their fellows. Surely his people must know of this thing; surely they must have taken steps to enter by this new door to freedom. In April, when he had fled, there had yet been no light in the old darkness of total proscription and total exclusion. He rose from his seat.

"That is well, Maître Goulleau. Trade will flow more freely across the borders of kingdoms, and within the kingdom all kinds of men will mingle more easily in useful pursuits. And as men get to know one another better, old hatreds and prejudices will disappear."

"You are a philosopher, Monsieur," said Goulleau in a toneless voice.

His slippers dragged across the floor to an old desk whence he took the document pledging a percentage of Saint-Florentin's emoluments or, these failing, the farms, specified by name, location, extent, revenue, present lessors, near the village of Dieu-le-fit to the extent of one hundred thousand livres to Jean de Vidal. He handed it to Joshua, who in his inner elation barely glanced at the several pages of elaborate legal caligraphy and equally elaborate antique verbiage. Carelessly, he passed it on to Saint-Florentin, who seemed to have sunk into gloom and who now, holding the pages of legal foolscap far from his eyes, too vain to avail himself of lenses, mumbled the many words to himself.

He finished at last, dragged himself more gloomily than ever to the desk, dipped the goose quill into a pewter inkwell and signed his name with a groan. Officiously, behind him, Goulleau strewed sand on the wet ink. Saint-Florentin turned and Joshua motioned courteously to the casket of gold which he had placed unobtrusively upon a dusty chair.

Goulleau folded the stamped and ribboned document.

"Now Monseigneur is well off again."

Saint-Florentin's head grew scarlet. Joshua had never seen him thus.

"*Canaille!*" he roared. "Scum!"

He dropped heavily into a chair; he leaned back and breathed slowly and grew paler. His frightened eyes sought Joshua.

"The doctors have forbidden me anger. I must control myself. But do not blame me. I have been of some use to this fellow. He came, as you observe, from the mud

of the gutter to which, despite his wealth and power, he still clings. He knows that I am all but ruined; he taunts me with the help that you, an honest gentleman, extend to me on terms so generous."

Saint-Florentin drew forth his fine large handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"Let us go," he said.

Obsequiously Goulleau approached him.

"Not so fast, Monseigneur, I beg of you. You do me wrong to doubt my gratitude or my loyalty to your interests."

"Ah," said Saint-Florentin. He sat up straight and folded his hands over his belly. "That is better."

"There is an affair of which I know," Goulleau continued, "which could be vastly profitable to you. Vastly." He stopped. "It is very private. Perhaps on another day—"

"Why another day? I have reason, as you know, to trust completely in the friendship and generosity of M. de Vidal. Has he not just given proof of both? If you have anything sensible to say, proceed!"

Goulleau with head a little on one side and expressionless eyes began: "You are a Minister and Secretary of State and a member of the Council on State papers?"

"I am."

"Therefore, you are officially empowered to present directly to His Majesty petitions from officially recognized groups of His Majesty's subjects?"

"'Tis understood. Go on, go on!"

"The six Corporations of Merchants and Tradesmen of Paris are in great fear of certain consequences that may attend upon the new regulations of commercial licences being permitted to foreigners. They would pre-

sent a petition to the King duly drawn up by a Minister of State."

Saint-Florentin laughed. "Louis will not read it. Let them send a deputation."

Goulleau shook his head. "The rector of the university of Paris headed a deputation. He addressed the King. What was the consequence? The King got a headache and the rector, a man bristling with learning, and his colleagues were driven forth with whips."

Saint-Florentin laughed.

"You and your stupid tradesmen did not know perhaps that this man, bristling with learning, as you say, had the feebleness of mind to deliver an erudite discourse in which he named forty kings from all periods of history who had been blinded by favorites. And His Majesty was fretting to get into his nightshirt and nightcap to go to the 'little apartments' of his Comtesse du Barry. Do you wonder at the headache and the whips?"

Joshua almost liked Saint-Florentin at this moment, even as he had almost felt sorry for him before.

Goulleau's expression did not change. "Whether we knew it or not matters little. We desire a petition to be presented. We desire the prayers of His Majesty's subjects to be granted. Whether the King reads it or not—to that we are indifferent."

Goulleau and Saint-Florentin looked into each other's eyes.

"You do not need me," said the Comte slowly. "You need Monsieur le Duc d'Aiguillon. 'Tis he has the favorite's ear."

Goulleau nodded. "He has refused. He refuses to deal with the *canaille* of tradesmen."

Saint-Florentin smiled self-approvingly. "I believe you.

Aiguillon is no philosopher. Liberty and tolerance mean nothing to him."

"While you, Monseigneur, are a friend and correspondent of M. de Voltaire."

Joshua thought that he heard a tone of swathed irony in Goulleau's voice. He watched the man carefully.

"It is my chief glory! What do your Six Corporations desire?"

Goulleau sat hunched in his chair. But his head was now stretched eagerly forward. "The Corporations are grateful to His Majesty for the new laws which have as their aim the generous patronage of commercial pursuits and desire to offer their loyal submission to these laws."

"Very proper," said Saint-Florentin. "They seem to be reasonable people."

"They do not even," Goulleau went on, "object to the new licences being given to foreigners. For if an Italian opens a shop on the Rue Saint-Honoré, doubtless the Italian States will permit a French subject to do the same in Milan or Genoa."

"Doubtless." The Comte sighed. "All this is a little boresome, Goulleau. More than a little. What do the Corporations object to?"

"The edict concerning licences was issued only a month ago. Already a great number of them have been obtained by the so-called Portuguese merchants of Bordeaux and by the Jews of Metz and of Paris."

A hot tingling started in the skin of Joshua's brow and glided stingingly over his whole body. His throat seemed to close. A soft sweetish sickness crept into his vitals.

Saint-Florentin shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly. "A certain philosophy of our days holds that the Jews

have a very good case, considering the treatment meted out to them by all the sovereigns of Europe."

Joshua was able to swallow the spittle stuck in his throat.

Goulleau changed neither posture nor expression. "It often happens that in desiring to rise above prejudices people abandon fundamental principles."

Saint-Florentin laughed. He did not laugh often. "'Tis not you who made that observation, Goulleau."

"I do not pretend it, Monseigneur. The Abbé Fleury of Saint-Eustache has sat with me and the chiefs of the Corporations. He points out that either the Jews deserved the treatment they have received everywhere and always on account of their guilt or else we must accuse all sovereigns everywhere and especially the Kings of France from Dagobert to the illustrious Louis XIII, called the Just, of merciless barbarity and unjustifiable oppression."

Saint-Florentin frowned. "I do not like clerical subtleties."

"The argument is not theological," Goulleau said doggedly. "The Abbé deliberately abstained from using the argument that the Jews are bearing the Divine Wrath for rejecting and crucifying the Saviour, and that kings and princes were therefore only the instruments of Providence. He established a moral and political dilemma, Monseigneur, to place before the King and his Ministers. Whose part will you take—the part of the Jews or the part of the Kings of France? Who was right and who was wrong?"

Saint-Florentin did not lose his frown. He changed his position. He pursed his lips. He swung oddly from side to side.

"I do not like the argument. I do not like the dilemma.

It smells of the craft of priests despite the fact that it is not theological. M. de Voltaire told me last month at Ferney that he had read the book of the Abbé Guene and also the writings of certain Frenchmen and Englishmen on the subject of a book by a certain Jew of Amsterdam named Isaac de Pinto. He admitted that he himself had erred. I have rarely heard my great friend admit to that."

Goulleau changed neither gesture nor expression. "Whose part will you take, Monseigneur? On which side will your profit be found?"

Joshua sprang up. "His Majesty, as I understand it, has issued the edict by virtue of which foreigners may obtain licences to trade. Very well. That is in accordance with all the noble and high ideas of tolerance of this age. Now foreigners avail themselves of this edict and your Corporations, whether out of envy or whether persuaded thereto by priests, desire to render His Majesty's edict of no avail. Is not the will of a living king more to be respected than the varying ordinances of kings long dead?"

Saint-Florentin applauded gently with the elegant gesture he used when at the Comédie or Opéra. He smiled. "Excellent, M. de Vidal. I care not for the Jews. But I care not for the priests either. These bourgeois with their new wealth take a great deal upon themselves to meddle with an edict of His Majesty. Why should any profit for me be found on the side of these tradesmen? I am a Minister of the King."

At last Goulleau raised his hand. "The Corporations are rich. They are willing to pay a million livres for the accomplishment of their object." Slowly and almost, as it were, absent-mindedly he repeated: "A million livres."

Moisture gathered in the corners of Saint-Florentin's mouth. The smile had faded. His hands clasped and unclasped themselves as though they were separate creatures.

"But can the king be persuaded to revoke an edict?" Joshua asked desperately.

Goulleau's hand had dropped. "There is no need. The Corporations do not desire it. Let foreigners possess licences; let the subjects of other kings trade in this kingdom. The fraternity of nations will be strengthened thereby."

"Well then?" Joshua asked.

"But the Jews are not foreigners. Where is their land? Where is their sovereign? This fraternity can only exist between self-subsistent nations and their sovereigns. But here we have a kind of men who know no native soil, no administrative law of their own, no loyalty to any particular sovereign who can be allied with other sovereigns or be their friend. This kind of men has no existence within the political order; between it and other nations there can be no fraternity. Is Monseigneur better pleased with this argument?"

"Wait!" Joshua cried. "Wait! If the Jews are not foreigners—not even foreigners, though born on the soil of this kingdom—what are they?"

Goulleau looked up at him with a strange suddenness. The man's face contorted itself into a grimace of cruel joy.

"Often when bees build their hives, wasps come and steal the honey of those industrious insects. Such creatures are the Jews. Wasps."

Saint-Florentin had not been listening. He drew a

deep breath now. "You said a million livres, Goulleau?"

"A million."

Heavily he got up. "I am weary. But we must consult further on this matter. Perhaps Monsieur de Vidal will continue to aid us with his cultivated understanding and readiness of wit."

The Second Book

THE WORLD BREAKS

Chapter One

It was in one of those medieval houses of wood which still throw their images in the river Ill in Strasbourg that the memoirs of Jehoshu'a Vidal were found. The year of the finding is obscure. The whole quarter of Strasbourg known for several centuries as La petite France has led a slumberous life through many wars and political overthrows. Jews could not easily have acquired property there until after the great French Revolution. No vestige of proof of Jewish occupancy now remains. Yet all circumstances, even before the manuscript was deciphered and translated, attest the correctness of the assertion that the charred, mildewed, tattered mass of sheets was found wedged between beams in a cellar of a house which from 1810 to 1918 was known as the Inn at the Sign of the Lark.

We shall see, of course, how close was Vidal's relation to Strasbourg and why, after whatever accidents, the manuscript of the memoirs was found in that city. We shall also see why the antiquary on the Meisengasse in Strasbourg, to whom the manuscript was first brought, need not have been so amazed to find fragments of sere palm leaves used as markers between certain pages and

need not have, as he confessed, been glad to get rid of this uncanny and exotic bundle of Hebrew writing.

The manuscript, easily enough acquired from the rather stupid Herr Antiquar Willibald Weismüller of the Meisengasse in Strasbourg, consists of one hundred and sixty-two folio pages predominantly written in rabbinical cursive script. Vidal sticks to that script even when he writes long passages in French, makes excerpts from French writers and records discourse in German. His French is more than correct; it is elegant. We could wish that he had written entirely in that language rather than in his not very flexible Hebrew. It is understandable, on the other hand, that he regarded these pages of an unusually private nature by reason of the really strange and romantic story of his great love, as well as on account of his opinions, which diverged more and more from the opinions of his contemporaries as time went on. For he was one of the few men of his age, a quiet private citizen, who doubted the exorbitant promises of that age and saw within them the symptoms of far-off disaster and decay.

As we now have it, the manuscript begins on a page which Vidal marked thirty-eight. The first half of that page was water-soaked. The writing is gone. This is true of many subsequent pages. Others are charred. Nor are the remaining folios continuous. What we have are a series of fragments, some longer, some shorter. To render these intelligible and to portray a character and a life in the round, it was necessary to reconstruct what must have been the contents of the lost pages. Such a reconstruction has been attempted in the first book of this narrative.

Two odd and happy and almost romantic accidents

furnished strong and vivid colors for the portrait to be drawn. On the banks of the Seine in Paris, in the box of a book-seller opposite the Rue du Bac, was found a well-preserved copy of the collected verses of Gaston de Saint-Florentin. His name is not on the title page. But the title itself: *Les Loisirs—Idle Hours, or Hours of Leisure*—and many bits of internal evidence render the authorship quite certain. The volume was published in 1769 by Neaulme and Company of La Haye, and was for sale at the shop of Lacombe on the Rue Christine.

Even more remarkable was a discovery of a copy of the printed version of that petition addressed to the King, Louis XV, by the Six Corporations of the Merchants and Tradesmen of Paris. The petition was duly indited by Monsieur de Saint-Florentin, Minister and Secretary of State, and Maître Goulleau, Advocate, and signed and executed by them in 1767. Exactly one hundred and sixty-one summers later it lay, a yellow pamphlet in a plain black binding, in a box of old books in front of a shop in the Via Bocca di Leone in the city of Rome, near the Spanish Stairs. Under a steel engraving delineating the roof of a pseudo-classic shrine, on which stout symbolical female figures uphold the crown and lilies of the French monarchy, begins that petition: "To the King and to the Lords of His Council," of which Joshua Vidal now proceeds to speak.

. . . if Saint-Florentin had never spoken of liberty and tolerance, I would have thought better of him. He was in constant correspondence with Voltaire; he prized the autographed copy of his works which that great man had sent him; he wrote to console him in his exile; he

addressed extravagant New Year's verses to him. Yet his heart was empty of any pity for his fellow men. I think cupidity was his only real passion. Goulleau sneered stealthily at me as he escorted us to the door of that dusty house of his. He knew his man. He knew the petition would be written and signed and duly presented. On the way back to our inn, I sought discreetly and yet strongly (hiding my grief and indignation, of course) to persuade Saint-Florentin that the thing must be done carefully and at leisure, seeing that the reward was promised not for the mere act but only for the successful issue. His face grew red.

"Was the *canaille* explicit on that point?"

"Entirely so, Monsieur," I replied. "He said that the Corporations were willing to pay that great sum, indeed, but only for the accomplishment of their object."

"Did he so? 'Tis not enough that I make myself the scribe and servant of grimy shop-keepers and mechanics. They give orders and make terms!"

I saw an opening. "'Tis truly not worthy of you to do their bidding."

He leaned back in the coach and sighed.

"You are rich, my young friend. Or else you have managed your affairs prudently. I, as you know, am impoverished and yet forced to live in a certain state. Who loves simplicity more than I? A cottage far from the world and communion with the Muses would suffice me. But I am as truly imprisoned in station and office as some poor prisoner in the Bastille. A million livres—ah!"

We reached the inn. He called for candles and food and wine and made me sit with him. A great carp from the carp-ponds of the Prince de Condé at Chantilly was served; next came a capon in an aromatic wine sauce. He

blamed me for my lack of prowess as a trencherman. He drank his wine from a silver goblet that he ever carried with him when he went abroad.

"Look you," he said, "philosophy is a very fine thing. It has liberated our minds. Have you ever considered that it has also contracted our hopes? Horace blames those born only to consume the fruits of the earth! But being a philosopher and believing in neither heaven nor hell nor purgatory, what else can I do but consume them? And they are good. Come, drink this Hermitage! It comes from the banks of the Rhone, your own country! Come!"

This was a way I had never heard him speak before. And for the moment, I confess to my shame, I almost fell in with his mood. I drank the heavy wine and was glad in a dim way of the brief surcease of misery it brought me. Yet was that surcease not entire. It was not then with me nor has it ever been. 'Tis true that the sharpest ache of the heart was somewhat dulled. But my mind was perfectly clear. I saw my well-beloved, the purest heart, the gentlest soul in all the world, perhaps over a book or over her embroidery frame, dreaming of me who loved her but whom she did not know—who, if she knew him and who he was, would fill her with horror and perhaps loathing. I saw my oppressed kinsmen and fellows ignorant of the new sword about to be brandished over their heads. Expulsions and slayings had ceased for a period of years and they were beginning to feel that, though despised and cut off from the general life of man, they were at least safe. And I, I had believed more; I had believed that in the age of Rousseau and Voltaire they would win their way from mere safety to freedom. Perhaps it was the wine; perhaps it was some words of

Voltaire which, deep now in his cups, Saint-Florentin repeated—whatever it was, I found that, despite all circumstances, I still believed this thing and swore to myself that I would not have fled in vain nor nursed these hopes in vain. First I would seek to avert, if I could, the danger that threatened the holy communities of Paris; thereafter, whether alone or not, I would fight on.

We lay late at the inn next morning. Saint-Florentin announced his agreement with me: if this thing were to be done it must be done carefully in his own study. Goulleau could come to Versailles with instructions from his new masters; he could bring with him, if he liked, that Abbé Fleury of whom he had spoken. Saint-Florentin laughed.

“You and I will be a match for the priest, however wily. I like not their pretensions. If this petition is to be written by me ’twill be done as a matter of law. I’ll not meddle with superstitions. Goulleau himself furnished two good arguments: first, that a whole series of edicts should be revoked before Jews can be merchants and therefore burghers of Paris; secondly, that not being foreigners within the sense and meaning of the edict, its provisions shall not apply to them. But it will go hard if you and I”—he dug me lightly in the ribs with unwonted familiarity—“find not still other and more cogent arguments.”

“Does not,” I asked as calmly as I could, “an edict of a King of France revoke by implication previous contrary edicts?”

Saint-Florentin looked morose. “It would flatter Louis to argue so. But what becomes of our petition?”

“What becomes of it if we use arguments that affront His Majesty?”

Now he was frightened. He clutched my sleeve. "You are a man of sense. You are the only one who can help me."

"You may trust me," I said not, despite all the circumstances, without shame.

He spoke of the matter no more during the rest of our journey to Versailles and I dared not broach it, for I was much afraid that he might change his mind and become secretive. The thought came to me that I might question Marguerite, and in the dusk of the coach I could feel myself burning with shame. Yet I knew the shame would not deter me, for the evil that threatened was too great not to be averted even at the sacrifice of delicacy and of what Saint-Florentin would have called—with how much justice I know not—the point of honor.

My house, when I reached it, seemed to me a hollow and an ominous place. Though I was weary, I had a fear of going to bed, as though my supineness would give freedom and power to some spirit of evil. The man Olivier bobbed his red, narrow, birdlike head up and down more like an officious crane or crow than ever; he sought to question me concerning the errand in Paris of Monseigneur the Comte and myself. Sharply I silenced and dismissed him. Yet when he was gone I could almost have called him back, so great was the strangeness and desolateness about me. Through the dark I saw Marguerite receiving her lord in a room bright with lit candles in all the sconces; I tossed, despite my weariness, nearly till dawn and then dreamed that Saint-Florentin was pursuing Marguerite down the dim hall that led to my grandfather's study, his own severed head in his left hand and a dagger in his right.

I awoke in a wild fever of impatience, glad only for

that the morning was stormy and that the trees tossed their tops with an appearance of strange passion in the wind. I despatched Pierre with a letter to my neighbors asking when the Comte and Comtesse would do me the honor of supping with me. I was burning to see Marguerite. But I burned almost equally to see the Comte and so discovered, to my grief, that hate and fear are passions hardly less powerful than love. I called in Olivier to consult him concerning the repast we might offer our guests when they came.

Olivier turned brick-red with eagerness.

"I have," said he bobbing mightily and laying his bony finger on his nose, "a magnificent *terriner* of *paté de foies gras* in the cellar; moreover, I know a man who is coming from Avalon tomorrow with brook trout from a stream that runs by the mill called, no one knows why, *des Ruats*. 'Tis not, alas, the season for game to which Monseigneur the Comte is partial. But I can get some ducks both fat and tender which may be first seethed in wine and then lightly roasted on the spit. A very estimable dish!"

He stalked suddenly to the window.

"There is Pierre! Now we shall know the day."

But Pierre brought a message that, though the Comte and Comtesse would be charmed to sup with me on any night of the week following, they took pleasure in asking me first to sup with them on the next night, when there would be not only a repast but a *divertissement* of music in honor of Madame de Moncrif who had returned after an absence of several weeks!

"Aha," said Olivier. His Adam's apple danced, as it were, up and down his thin red throat. "The Moncrif woman! She is the curse of that house. 'Tis my opinion

she knows some sinister secret of the Comte or panders to some unnatural passion of his; for 'tis certain she goes to his bed right under the nose of the poor young Comtesse."

"Silence!" I cried. Yet deep within me I was glad enough to believe the man. For if he spoke truth my own sin of adultery, of which I was sadly aware, despite the great sweetness and tenderness between Marguerite and me, seemed much more pardonable.

The storm died in the early afternoon. No sooner had night fallen than, hid in a long cloak, I hastened to our trysting-place by the little temple at the end of my garden and waited, torn between the fierce hope and fiercer despair of youth. She came. 'Twas late and she was pale. But she came and threw herself with an extreme abandon on my breast.

"Let us not speak," she plead. "There is nothing to speak of but what is ugly and evil. And I have only a moment. Hold me close, Jean, close!"

I understood her meaning. Was I not equally abashed and tormented by the evil in the world? But we two in each others' arms always felt that we could shut the evil out. For though she knew not who or what I was, and though her story was like a legend to me, there was naught between us but good and loving-kindness, and neither she nor I could ever understand why men should desire to be cruel and oppressive or invent cruel and oppressive laws. Our spirits breathed but by some law of love and I have often thought in these later years that she and I began by being as purely united as men will be in the *olam haba'a*, the world to come in the days of the Messiah.

On the next night was the *divertissement* at the

Chateau de Saint-Florentin. A thousand candles spread a golden haze through the great rooms. The Duc de Choiseul, a tall thin man with a white still mask of a face, was there, as was his lady. Marguerite's sky-blue robe of taffeta was sprinkled with rose buds; I hated the cold lecherous eyes of the Duc upon her white bosom. Lisette de Moncrif chose to hover near me and to assure me that the Duc had said handsome things of me. I shuddered to think of the dark involvement with nameless spies which had made it possible for Valdes to persuade Choiseul. Saint-Florentin played his part of a great, elegant lord, detached from all the cares of earth and toying with the Muses of all the arts. He held by the arm, as though he had a puppet for display, a small fattish effeminate man, whom he introduced as Monsieur Guignon, a famous performer upon the violin. He bragged of Guignon's fame and achievements as though they were his own. "He has played for the King of Poland and at the Spanish court. Potsdam has heard him and Buckingham Palace. Rare, rare artist!" I thought I saw a sardonic gleam in Choiseul's cold eyes.

Lisette de Moncrif whispered to me: "And I must accompany the prodigy!"

"Then you are an artist yourself, Madame," I said.

She laughed. "La, la! I have soothed Gaston a thousand times, playing and singing. Now, married to his fair shepherdess, he misses me."

The footmen served a collation of cold pasties and cold birds and sweets. I attempted to approach Marguerite, but with a warning in her blue eyes she glanced at Lisette de Moncrif. There was but little spoken by anyone until Saint-Florentin gave the signal for the company to enter

the room in which stood the gilt harpsichord with lyres and flute-players on its carved lions' feet. A humble-looking man with a cello appeared beside it. Lisette sat down at the instrument and Guignon took his fiddle from its case. At last, by a wave of her hand scarce perceptible, Marguerite beckoned me to a low chair at her side.

These three played the airs of that Master Rameau to whom Saint-Florentin had written his laudatory verses. Scarcely could I keep myself from stretching out my hand after Marguerite's, so that those heavenly sounds might seem to vibrate in us both. In the strangest manner the music was at once grave and gay: grave as dark groves of wide umbrageous trees under a moon; gay with the last gaiety of parting lovers.

The company applauded. But I observed at once that the plaudits of Choiseul and Saint-Florentin, whose heads had been leaning close together, were but faint. They must have held converse in whispers during the playing. Choiseul's mask was whiter than ever; Saint-Florentin was pink with rage. They drew away from each other now as they observed the eyes of the company upon them and, as Guignon and the cellist retired, Lisette de Moncrif announced that she would sing an air of Lully. She sang the song of a woman awaiting and welcoming a hero. It was a noble song with a great curve and sweep of melody and I confess that she sang it well in her deep and shadowy voice. Yet when she ended there was no applause. The Duc de Choiseul arose and turned upon Saint-Florentin.

"I care not if you are bankrupt, Monsieur, nor what vast sums the Corporations are offering. You are not to

go to that whore who is befouling Louis and ruining the kingdom!"

Saint-Florentin's face was scarlet. Heavily he arose.

"You have ordered me about too long, Monsieur le Duc. If Madame du Barry persuades the King to grant the petition of the Corporations, she will have done a very good deed for this kingdom. Or have you taken bribes from the Jews? It has been known to be done."

Choiseul's tone was dry. "I can afford to be indifferent to your insults. I am determined—"

Suddenly Saint-Florentin laughed. "I have heard that. Are you so jealous of the King? Does the wench please you so?"

Choiseul made a gesture, as though he were about to draw his sword. He let his hand fall.

"It is the weak who threaten. But I predict that you will be ruined."

Lisette de Moncrif sprang up from her seat by the harpsichord. "We are not entirely your creatures, Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul. I have already consulted Madame d'Aubigny to whom Jeanne du Barry owes her presentation at Court, and Jeanne will persuade the King, if need be, in her very bed."

Marguerite arose slowly from her seat.

"I know not what this secret matter is. But since there is a woman more deeply in my husband's councils than I, I shall withdraw."

Lisette laughed and stood in front of Marguerite. "Gaston and I have known each other for twenty years. He took my youth. He took my money. Then, when he should have married me, he married you—you—and still insisted that I be his mistress. Very well. I see a way of getting my money back, at least."

Again she laughed and her laughter was not quite sane. A strange roar, almost like an animal's, came from Gaston de Saint-Florentin. His face was purplish rather than red. Then it turned chalky white and, with a great thud, the heavy man fell suddenly to the floor.

Chapter Two

OLD Monsieur Petit, physician in ordinary to the King, more skilled in obsequious compliments to great lords and honeyed compliments to elderly coquettes than in the art of healing, refused to commit himself on the subject of Saint-Florentin's disorder. "It may be," he said, according to Olivier's half-mocking report, "an apoplexy; on the other hand it may be a hydropsy of the chest." He bled his patient profusely, discoursed learnedly on the properties and uses of the different kinds of enemas, and flourished a clyster-pipe of monstrous length. He prescribed nauseous mixtures which his patient could not retain, subjected him to phlebotomy once more, and left predicting that Saint-Florentin would be able to sit up in bed and eat some chicken broth within two days.

I called at the chateau to inquire after the Comte's health. Marguerite received me in the great drawing-room. We were alone together for the first time according to the ordinary ways of the world, and it was a strange thing to us. We were shy of each other. I dared barely kiss her hand. Moreover, she was very weary, having kept watch at her husband's pillow all through the night. Lisette de Moncrif had left, she told me in a small hard

voice; she was determined that the woman should not enter her house again while she herself was in it. Her bitterness, seeing how she detested Saint-Florentin, seemed strange to me at that time. In the years since I have learned to understand how wounded and humiliated she had felt for the young girl that she had been, the girl who had so trustingly at first followed Saint-Florentin out into the world. I felt in that hour that she had withdrawn herself from me and a great dumb pain crept into my vitals. But she seemed to perceive this and, laying her hand lightly on my arm, promised to meet me.

"Petit is a quack," she said. "He is like the physician in the old Molière comedy. But his sleeping potions are strong." She smiled a sudden subtle smile at me. "Shall I give Gaston a triple dose, so that he sleeps forever?"

"God forbid!" I cried.

She looked about her to see that no flunkey was spying. Then she put her hands on my shoulders and gazed up into my eyes.

"You need have no fear. I am not capable of such an act. Yet are we not cowards, rightly looked upon? Perhaps we shall burn in Purgatory. But according to the priests we shall burn anyhow!"

"I fear not that," I said. "I fear the sin upon my conscience."

She laughed. "You are a philosopher, my poor Jean." Her head leaned against my breast. "I love you for it. Yet, tell me, is it not a great pity that we cannot belong to each other openly and forever?"

"It is a great pity," I said and a sob shook me at the thought of how more utterly hopeless it was than even she conceived.

She pressed her dear head against me.

"Oh so great, Jean. And I will tell you why. Or do you think you know?"

"I think I know. But tell me—you!"

"I have seen the peasants and the poor gentry in Auvergne and now I have seen the fine ladies and gentlemen in town and at Court. They coquette and they copulate for pleasure or interest or both. But there is very little love in the world. Oh, so little! Sometimes I have thought that I would rather go begging with you—"

Her voice broke. But in a moment she was mistress of her emotion and bade me go, renewing her promise to meet me when she could.

From that moment on we were dearer and closer to each other than ever before. For we had never before put into words the greatness and the hopelessness of our love. Sorrow deepened both our loving-kindness and our passion and I, at least, perhaps a fool in this regard, lived quite deliberately for the day and the night which were here and sunk myself into that day and into that night to the uttermost, forgetting fate, forgetting that the very stars in their courses fought against us, as aforetime they had fought against Sisera, plunging deep, deep, into the star-sprent pool of each unfathomable hour.

Petit had been too hopeful. It was an entire week before Saint-Florentin was raised to a sitting posture amid many pillows and called for both broth and wine. Two days later he attempted to rise from his bed and did, indeed, rise. And now it became clear from the dragging of his right leg and the awkwardness of his right arm that it was an apoplexy that had stricken him. But his mind was alert and clear; vanity caused him to hide his infirmities so far as he might; he was querulous and vastly sorry for himself and spoke—though these speeches

were almost laughable attempts to propitiate and avert fate—of setting his house in order and leaving to his wife a fortune worthy of her rank and beauty. The first thing to do, he told her, was to set up for the Corporations of the Merchants and Tradesmen of Paris the petition on the outcome of which depended the mending of his fortunes. He bade her despatch a messenger to Goulleau to summon him to Versailles; he bade her send a footman to apprize me of his purpose; he swore that he had kept this matter from her out of delicacy, not desiring to connect his wife with the affairs of the King's licentious mistress; he accused Lisette of monstrous lies and Choiseul of an arrogance which no man of honor or dignity could any longer endure.

In dry tones not void of irony, Marguerite communicated these matters to me. "He is like to outlive us all now that he no longer eats five dishes and drinks two bottles of wine at every meal. I told him that I wanted no great fortune; he treated me like a child ignorant of the world. What do you think of this petition, Jean?"

"'Tis asking the King to consent to an act of monstrous injustice against innocent and helpless people!"

"You mean the Jews, Jean? But did they not kill the Christ?"

"'Tis a matter of grave doubt whether they did or no. But those who are said to have done so, lived more than seventeen centuries ago. The injustice will not be suffered by the long dead but by the living?"

"The world is sad, I think," she said softly.

"Look you," I cried, "in your veins runs the blood of the Valois kings."

She smiled. "My father swore it and that he had parchments of proof."

"The last of those kings died not quite two centuries ago. Think you they committed no evil deeds?"

"Nay, but they did."

"Yet would it not be monstrous to hound you and all in whom that blood flowed, to keep you from freedom and honor, from art and trade, from friendship and office, from the goodness of the earth and the very light of the sun to live in obscurity and terror, under the lash of cruelty and the stripes of derision?"

She threw herself upon my breast.

"What goodness of heart you have, my friend."

A silence fell upon my soul. She was glad that I commiserated even the vilest outcasts. That I should have anything but a distant pity for them would have been monstrous and unbelievable to her. I pressed her to me, but within me all was dark—dark the hope for a new age of tolerance and freedom, dark the dream of human brotherhood, dark the belief that the words of the enlightened and the good were about to become flesh, even as the Christians feign to believe that the Word of God had become flesh. I loved her no less. 'Twas no fault of hers. But I swore by the Eternal to protect my kindred and asked her most particularly once more to repeat to me the day and the hour when Maître Goulleau would come from Paris to confer with Saint-Florentin concerning the accursed petition to the King.

The day came and the hour. Goulleau glanced at me curiously from under discreet lids. But I affected indifference and Saint-Florentin acted as though my presence strengthened and consoled him. Goulleau had brought with him long notations and divers papers from which he read; in addition he had a sheaf of small disquisitions on various points in which the Abbé Fleury displayed his

erudition. With the flicker of a smile, he read from one of these which had slipped from his hand to the floor. "Talmud is a pure Hebrew word and signifies properly 'teaching which is received by being taught.' This book is a compilation of the meditations of the Jewish rabbins on the laws both human and divine; it is a tissue of blasphemies against Jesus Christ and His Church."

I clenched my hands.

"'Tis asserted by the Abbé Guené in his famous book which even Monsieur de Voltaire accepted and approved, that neither Jesus Christ nor His Church are ever mentioned in the books of the rabbins."

Goulleau tittered suddenly.

"Are you an advocate of the Jews, Monsieur de Vidal?"

"I am a follower of the philosophers of our time, as is Monsieur de Saint-Florentin whose highest boast is that he is the friend of Voltaire. Consequently, believing in the enlightened wisdom of His Majesty, I hold it not wise to deal with the superstition of dark ages."

Saint-Florentin nodded. "I am in accord with Monsieur de Vidal. Let us stick to law and fact, Goulleau."

"It shall be as Monseigneur pleases. Since their last revolt against the Roman Empire and the Emperor Hadrian which they undertook under a man named Barchochebas, the Jews were proscribed everywhere and always: by our ancient king Dagobert in 633, by Phillipe-Auguste in 1182; their goods were confiscated and they were expelled by Phillipe-le-Bel in 1306, and Phillipe-le-Valois offered them the choice between expulsion and conversion in 1346. Finally, certain Jews of Spain and Portugal, having entered France on the plea of commercial necessity, Louis XIII, son and father of two great kings, affirmed in his declaration of April 23, 1615 all

the measures and ordinances of his predecessors and denied the Jews, excepting those of Metz, the right of residence in this kingdom. The defenders of the Jews may say that they should not be subjected to the decrees of dark ages. But the age of Louis XIII was not a dark age and its decisions were sustained by orders of expulsion from various cities in which the Jews sought to establish themselves in 1729, 1730, 1731 and 1740—that is to say, almost to our own day.

“Such, Monseigneurs, is the law.

“The facts behind the law and at the foundation of our plea are that the Jews have never been considered foreigners and cannot be so considered, since they have no land of their own, owe no allegiance to any sovereign and can therefore have no natural attachment to any soil nor pay a willing obedience to any sovereign; no state has dared to confer upon them the rights of citizens, for they have not and cannot be brought up in the principles of legitimate authority. Whatever the protestations of the Jews may be to the contrary, whatever may be the apparent honorableness of conduct of a few among them, we are not to be seduced. . . .”

I know not how long he droned on. I was young when this thing happened and I had believed that the day for such things was over. My brain seemed to be on fire at the horror of it. For in truth, it seemed too late in the world's age for such foulness and such folly. Only there were foul and foolish, envious and wicked men who desisted from no means if thereby they could secure for themselves some small, immediate advantage, however partial, however transitory. I watched the widening eyes of Saint-Florentin. He cared no whit for either the law, as he had pompously said, nor the fact. He believed in

neither. He needed money. That was all. He nodded in approval more and more often. There was no longer any doubt as to the event. He would rewrite what he was told in his best style. The petition would be slipped stealthily into the hands of the King's favourite. The question burned in my mind: Would ready cash go with it? Or would the stupid and niggardly Corporations risk not a ducat till their end was gained? Then we might play an equal and a better game. For, though gold was our one defense against cruelty and wrong, yet were we not afraid to risk it! I trembled to be gone. Yet I dared not go abruptly. Once more I listened.

“. . . And so may it please Your Majesty to order that the Jews who have procured licences as merchants or artisans be forthwith forbidden to make use of the aforesaid licences; that they be ordered to return them and that the sums by them paid for the procuring of the aforesaid licences be rendered back and restituted to them. And so shall these petitioners continue their wishes for His Majesty.”

“Excellent, excellent!” exclaimed Saint-Florentin. “What think you, Monsieur de Vidal?”

I assumed indifference. “’Tis a small matter. Nor care I whether a handful of Jews trade openly in Paris or not. The whole matter appears to me a strange one in an age when we are learning concerning the rights of man as man—the image of his Creator. Our great and dear Jean-Jacques has said in his *Social Contract*—”

“Ah, Monsieur de Vidal,” said Saint-Florentin with a melancholy sigh, “who loves more than I the noble speculations of that great soul? Who more than I would want to dwell in a society of Nature’s making and honor all who bear the human countenance? Who more, who

more? But we are not now in the realm of the ideal or of Nature or of the Muses! We live in a civil society according to precedent, tradition and law; I belong to the Council of State Papers and I have no right, even if I desired to do so, to refuse these petitioners my services as intermediary between themselves and their king. How I envy you, young, rich, unburdened by office, who can live in the kingdom of the Graces and cultivate the ideal!"

He was moved by his melancholy eloquence; he touched a large, fine kerchief to his eyes. I saw within me a dark vision: the *shammash*, the sexton, going by dusk from house to house in the Jews' street to summon the men to the synagogue to be told that once more hope was dead and freedom as far off as ever and degradation and stealth and mean, ignoble necessities prolonged. I could hear the low wailing of women. I could see the pale, frightened, still faces of children. Had I not been such a child myself in Avignon when it was made known to the holy community there that our petition to the Pope, praying that we be no more forced to wear the yellow hat, praying that our elders be no more driven to hear the accursed sermons of the Dominicans, was rejected with every circumstance of contumely and scorn?

As through a dark mist I heard the voice of Saint-Florentin. "I am, Monsieur de Vidal, rather to be commiserated in that I must follow not inclination but duty."

"Without doubt," I forced myself to say.

He turned to Goulleau. "I think we can complete the setting forth of all the arguments in proper form tonight."

Goulleau's voice was harsh. "We can. Nor need we trouble Monsieur de Vidal. The scrivener is ready to

engross the copies—one for His Majesty, one for Madame d'Aubigny."

Saint-Florentin turned a little pale. "I must send for Lisette. Why has she not been here?"

"That, Monseigneur," said Goulleau in a voice still harsher and more commanding, "that is your affair. And time presses!"

"Why?" Saint-Florentin asked, and there was fear in his voice.

Goulleau coughed. "There are ugly rumours abroad that the King's patience with the Duc de Choiseul is at an end."

Saint-Florentin lurched forward as best he could. "I have been a sick man. I have heard nothing. But what care I for Choiseul?"

"You are known to be of his party. You owe your office to him. Now, a fortnight ago Madame du Barry and her friends found the seats reserved for them at the Théâtre de Choisy occupied by the Duc's sister-in-law and her party. They refused to leave the seats. There was an outcry. The Duchess's sister was pleased to screech that the coquine, the slut, could take her behind elsewhere." Goulleau coughed that conscious cough of his again. "A time may very soon come when a friend of yours will not even be received by Madame d'Aubigny and most assuredly, if things go even a little farther, Madame d'Aubigny will not be so foolish as to go to the Comtesse du Barry with a petition from the camp of her bitterest enemies."

Saint-Florentin tried to rise. He slid back, suddenly grey and old, into his seat.

"But I have quarreled with Choiseul to the death!"

"So it has been rumoured, too, but no one believes it.

"Tis thought to be a feint by which Choiseul can keep a spy at court if he is banished."

"A monstrous lie!"

"Perhaps."

Now Goulleau did a thing which almost made me feel sorry for the Comte. He drew forth a small, dirty pewter snuff-box and took a pinch. He sneezed. There was an infinite contemptuousness in the action. It meant: parts are reversed. I am master in this very house.

Saint-Florentin's pale, soft, sickly flesh quivered.

"Let your scrivener engross the copies. I shall have them presented through proper channels. I have no fear of the outcome."

I had no time to reason yet concerning these things that I was hearing. But a hope and a plan arose in my mind.

Indifferently I said: "I have often wondered how long it takes a good scrivener to write two copies of such a document."

"Three to four days," said Saint-Florentin.

I nodded and arose. I expressed to the Comte my best wishes for his health. I assured him of my belief in his clever handling of this affair. I said that I would be in Paris for a few days on matters of my own. I begged him not to rise. I turned to the door not without noticing a sudden hot gleam of dislike and suspicion in Goulleau's eyes.

The Papal Treasurer of Avignon, a cynical enlightened prelate who had had many profitable dealings with my father, had permitted him to have saddle horses. So it came about that in an age when few Jews had ever mounted a saddle I was a good horseman. I ran to my house and bade Olivier procure me a mount. The coach-

horses were useless. I told him to spare no expense but to keep a prudent tongue in his head. "I ride by night to town. There is a matter of the welfare of friends." If he babbled, as I knew he would, to the flunkeys of Saint-Florentin, the Comte would believe that I sped to deliver some stroke in his behalf; he nursed the curious notion that none could be concerned with any but himself.

I trembled lest that night Marguerite fail her tryst. Gently the trees waved their tops in the summer breeze; a great copper moon appeared at the edge of the world and glared through the trunks of the trees. She came. She was ever faithful, seeking to spare me all uneasiness of spirit, careful to inflict upon me neither hurt nor slight.

"I ride to Paris tonight."

Her face was pale. "I shall be all alone without you," she said in a steady voice. "It seems to me, Jean, that I was always all alone in the world until you came."

"And so was I," I cried, and she knew that that cry came from my very heart. "Nor shall I ever leave you willingly. But I know not what fate awaits me."

She looked into my eyes. "Think not, my friend, that I have not felt a breath of mystery about you. I love you too deeply not to have perceived that. But I have not dared to ask."

I drew her close. Anguish burned within me like a living fire.

"If ever you hear a thing about me stranger than any that you dream, remember how our two souls felt no difference one from the other; how, rather, the two seemed to be one. Will you do that?"

"I will remember. Indeed, I will. But are you coming back?"

"I shall come back to you—if I live."

I drew my cloak about me and ran through the garden. The groom was standing at the restive horse's head. I swung into the saddle and rode toward the gigantic head of that copper moon.

Chapter Three

THAT was a strange home-coming. The bright dawn turned sullen in the dim Jews' street. A horseman was a rare thing here and commonly an evil one. So I walked the beast slowly and tied him to the post at the street's end. Not yet were the sleepy elders bustling to the synagogues for morning prayer. I stood in front of my grandfather's house and heard my heart beat like a hammer. There had been little need for such great haste. The doors were barred and bolted and I had no stomach for raising an alarm. I walked over to the River Seine and saw poor men and women, their empty wine mugs of the night before beside them, still sleeping on the bank. Protected from the chill of morning only by their thin rags, they huddled together for a little warmth. 'Twas a sight most pitiful to see and I fell to wondering, as I had often done, at the hard hearts of the great. The river flowed peacefully to the far sea; the trees waved their plumes in the wind. Now and then one of the poor slumbering vagrants, one of the houseless and homeless ones, would turn or stir with a loud moan.

I fell into a reverie in that place and was overcome by the great strangeness of life: the fate of Israel, a people

like other peoples, for had not all peoples their own ways of worshiping God and remembering their ancestors to do them honor? I thought of the cruel inequalities among men: from those stricken beggars that crowded the alley where stood Goulleau's house to Gaston de Saint-Florentin amid his footmen in their scarlet liveries. Yet he too was wretched, a sick man and a bankrupt one, desiring to be loved and powerless to give love. And at last I thought of Marguerite, as I had not hitherto dared—of her beauty and goodness and gentleness and of the darkness of her fate. I saw that darkness suddenly as a thing to be touched by hands and my own powerlessness to bring her light. Then I roused myself strongly, for in this mood I was not like to perform the errand on which I had come. It was—or so I thought in those days of my youth—a mood of sheer weakness. A blow was to be struck and here I was giving way to an unmanly softness. I walked back to the Jews' street; with what brave high hopes had I set out from it! At least I was returning to help a cause which, even were it to be defeated, still bore witness to the appearance of a new spirit in the world. I took heart again. Liberty and tolerance were not destined—how could they be?—to prevail without a struggle. Fortunate was he who could defend them in the inevitable fray.

I knocked at the door of my grandfather's house almost with a smile at the strangeness of the action. Rivkah, our old Caucasian serving-woman, drew back the bolts and faced me. Her eyes stared and her hands shook. She fled but left the door open and I entered and soon found myself in the familiar room beside my old desk. Footsteps rang on hollow wood; it was a familiar tread. My father entered, pale, frowning, with a gesture as though

he were warding off some evil with his hands. His voice, when he spoke, had nothing of its accustomed dryness or steadiness.

"What seek you here, *meshumad*, renegade?"

"I am none," I said simply.

He was in great agitation. "How am I to believe you? What Jew ever left his people except to join himself to their foes and betray them? There was a bishop in Spain who fanned the fires of hatred. There have been—"

I interrupted him. "We are living in another age. I went forth more like the spies that Joshua sent; I sought to spy out the new day of tolerance for our people."

"You are not baptised?"

"I am not."

"We mourned for you as for the dead."

I stood up before him, close to him and repeated the *Shema*—"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

He touched me, as was not his wont. His hands trembled a little. He had loved and mourned me in his own cold way.

"I must go and tell your grandfather. Your going away inclined his white head nearer to the pit."

A pang smote me. Yet I prayed my father to wait.

"Have you taken out one of the licenses under the new decree permitting foreigners to trade openly in Paris?"

He sat down and put his two hands on his knees and thrust his head forward.

"There was a rumour of that edict before you went away."

"I remember."

"I thought little of it; I lent the rumour little credence; I knew only that Grandfather was alarmed."

"Alarmed?"

"Yes. He shall tell you his reasons himself. But I would have you know, my son, that since the edict was issued and many of our brethren have bought the licences I have been sorely tempted too." For the first time in my remembrance I saw a dreamy look in my father's eyes. "A counting-house in the city and open honorable affairs! 'Twould be a great thing for our people."

"Would it not?" I cried. "Would it not give us the rights and lives and liberties of other men? Would we not be burghers of Paris, as we ought to be?"

He nodded eagerly.

"And this thing is endangered. But the danger can be averted. I am here to warn and counsel and help!"

He looked up with the habitual light of sober and attentive wisdom in his eyes. "Tell the tale."

I told him not where I had been nor all that I had seen and experienced. Only this, that passing for a Christian I had obtained the confidence of the Comte de Saint-Florentin (at the mention of that name my father frowned) and knew concerning the petition of the Corporations of Merchants and Traders of Paris, and knew also by what private ways it was proposed to persuade the King through his mistress to do the will of the Corporations. My father raised a hand. In all practical matters he had the swiftest judgment of any man I ever knew.

"If these things are as you say, it is for us to send an emissary at once to Madame d'Aubigny not with

promises but with gold, or else send him directly to that Madame du Barry with jewels rare and priceless."

"It is so," I said. "Has the community wealth enough?"

My father brooded a minute. "They would send help from Bordeaux and from Avignon; Cerfberr would send a round sum; so would a few men of substance from Metz; we could borrow of our brethren in Amsterdam, even in London." He arose and walked up and down with nervous tread. "For, look you, Joshua, rights acquired in Paris would spread from land to land."

He stopped. He drooped.

"But it is a dream. And you are a dreamer. When has justice ever been granted to our suffering nation? I, at least, have hoped for none and have been contented to walk on the accustomed way. Moreover, Grandfather—but you shall hear. Only I must prepare the old man for your return."

He went and stayed, or so it seemed to me, a great while. When at last he returned it was with a melancholy countenance.

"It was hard to persuade him that you are neither betrayer nor informant. Go, say your *Shema'* to him."

I followed my father through the corridors to that well-remembered door. My grandfather had grown thinner and whiter, but his great eyes still burned. At the door, before approaching him more nearly, I declared the Unity. I came nearer, but he hid his hands in his sleeves. He neither spoke nor bade me sit. It was my father who now explained the matter of the petition of the Corporations and of my knowledge and of what, though he had proposed it, he chose to call my plan.

Grandfather took his hands from his sleeves. He mo-

tioned to us to be seated. Had I never observed before how well preserved was his small, neat hand? He murmured for a moment indistinguishably in his beard. Then he spoke: "A gentile once asked our master Gamaliel why the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to Moses in a bush of thorns. The master replied: Had He revealed Himself in a fig-tree, one might imagine that there is a place on earth void of the *Shechinah*, the Divine Abiding. But He revealed Himself in a thorn-bush to teach us that there is no place on earth void of the *Shechinah*."

I saw that my father was for once losing his accustomed patience.

"I would have you know, Rabbi, that I am a man of earth and that I and your grandson are here to consult you on a practical matter."

My grandfather smiled.

"Do I not know you, Mordecai? Do I not know you practical men of earth who think they can manage the affairs of earth? Behold the earth and the affairs of men! Behold what you have made of it! You stoned the prophets in your day; you are like dogs. A bone is thrown to you and your teeth are in it. What if it be a stone?"

"Your meaning is dark," my father muttered.

"Come into that darkness and we may find light. The *Shechinah* is everywhere and our God is a God of truth, and our *Torah* is a teaching of truth. How then shall good come of lies and subterfuges in a world filled with the Divine Abiding of the God of Truth? How?"

His voice was stern.

"When we were driven from Spain and Portugal," he continued, "we took refuge in Bordeaux as New Christians and Portuguese merchants. We had no choice

between that and martyrdom. And martyrdom, as the sages taught and also that Moses ben Maimon whom I do not wholly trust, is not always obligatory. Yet see what has happened! Because it was not true that we were Christians and Portuguese merchants, because we returned to the faith and ways of Israel, the gentiles say now, according to messages that were brought me but ten days ago: 'Behold the perfidious Jews; they insinuated themselves as New Christians and Portuguese merchants. Their patents and charters are so enscrolled and inscribed. Perfidious they are; perfidious they remain.' Untruth thrives not within the Divine Abiding."

My father's voice was dry and almost harsh.

"The licenses issued to foreigners under the edict of the King do not exclude the Jewish nation nor have Jews been refused the licences."

"Nay. Yet already you tell me that the Corporations of the merchants and tradesmen of Paris murmur against our classing ourselves as foreigners."

"'Tis against all reason and justice," I exclaimed.

My grandfather smiled. "Are you too a practical man and a man of earth? They talk about reason and justice, and mean their short-sighted advantage. We are not foreigners like other foreigners; we are not like other men; we are a people by the witness of the spirit. And the world does not love the spirit. The world murmurs against the spirit and seeks to soil and break it."

He seemed quenched for a moment and heavy-lidded and very old. His head swayed a little forward. But he roused himself, though his voice was softer.

"The lie corrupted the holy community of Bordeaux too. How cruel have they been to their suffering brethren from Avignon and from elsewhere! Why? Because

they were afraid that more and more Jews in their community would make men wholly forget that fiction concerning New Christians and Portuguese merchants. The lie works evil to all."

"Speak to the purpose, Rabbi," my father said.

The old man raised his head. He was majestic now. "Think you I would not diminish the bondage and the sufferings of Israel? Doubt you that I would go to the stake like all the holy martyrs of all the ages?"

"We do not doubt it," I said.

"Then hear me! Hear me, Joshua, you who have told me that this is a new age in which tolerance and freedom would lighten the hearts of men! Were this so I would rejoice and give thanks to the Eternal. But what signs and tokens are there? Have they come to us and said: 'You have been unjustly oppressed; go free! Your portion has been tears; it shall now be laughter!' Have they? Nay. An edict was issued by a king. Many edicts have been issued by many kings. The edict seemed to leave a little back door—a little dark half-hidden back door—through which we could slip. No sooner do we seek to do this secret and stealthy thing than the people begin to rise up against us. And, to cause their plans to go awry, you would bribe the King's whore!"

My father and I were silent. We saw that the old man was gathering his strength and had not finished. And in truth he drew himself up.

"'I know that my Redeemer liveth,'" he quoted. "Israel will be redeemed. But it will not be redeemed until the world of the peoples is redeemed. That is not yet. Open shops in this city because you have lied and affronted the *Shechinah* with lies. What will happen? You will be ashamed to close them on the *Shabbath*;

your children will eat swine's flesh. You will be renegades and traitors for the advantages of the world. Yet shall that not avail you. You will still be a mock to the people—aye, doubly so. For our God is a God of truth, and Israel is His people."

"Then you would wait for the Messiah?" I was astonished at my father's level ironic tone.

"Yes," said my grandfather firmly. "I would wait for the Messiah. I know not in what form He will come, that son of David; I know not whether He will redeem us by redeeming the world or whether He will lead us out of an unredeemed world to our own land and our holy city. I know not; I know not, and my soul is dark. But this I know: that evil, however long delayed, will spring from untruth, from falseness, from a freedom that is only another and, for aught I know, a deeper kind of bondage."

"Grandfather," I said gently, "the time is ripe for a change. We cannot bide as we are. I have been mingling with the world of the gentiles. I do not say that there are not noble souls among them."

I stopped, for I thought of Marguerite and my voice all but broke.

"Have you heard me speak evil against them?" my grandfather asked.

"Never. But their states are strong and their societies are great. Yet do they oppress even their own and carry out base intrigues and resort to war. All that we purpose to do is to take advantage of a just law and prevent malice and superstition from driving us back into slavery and humiliation. Is that so evil in comparison?"

The old man arose. He steadied himself by leaning his hands against the table.

"There is no comparison. They did not hear the voice from Horeb. They made not the Covenant. They are free and I judge them not; and a righteous gentile, as we are taught, is equal to the High Priest in Israel. But the three pillars of our world are justice, truth, peace. Shake one and you destroy all."

He slid slowly back into his seat. His eyes were half closed. His hand sought a book on the table. He murmured a penitential psalm. Softly we withdrew.

My father faced me in our counting-house. I had never seen him so agitated. He had gone on his not unprosperous way quietly and far-sightedly, as be seemed his temper, and meddled not with things he deemed too high for him. Now the vision of freedom, deepened by my coming back loyal and unharmed, had taken a hold on him.

"Your grandfather is a *Zaddik*, righteous and just. But I will not bow down to him in this matter. I shall summon the elders of the three congregations this very night. Many of them, I have cause to believe, have taken out the licences. Do you go out into the city and use your ears and understanding. It may be that you will learn something that will advantage us."

I found my horse, took it to a stable-keeper to be groomed and fed, and rode straight to the Rue de la Lune and stopped at the sign of the wig-maker. It was the man Valdes who had intrigued for me through the Duc de Choiseul; if anyone knew more about the matter that concerned us so deeply, it would be he.

I found him more bony and wry of face than when I had last seen him. There were two hectic spots on his cheeks, as though a fever burned him. He laughed, and his laughter was truly like the crackling of dry logs in a chimney.

"You are not the booby I thought you. You slept with the wench and mortgaged the Comte's last property, the very existence of which he had kept secret."

"You lie!" I cried.

"Do I, Monsieur de Vidal, do I?"

"The way you put it is base and dishonorable. A base and dishonorable mind has been your informer."

The corners of his mouth curved down in ugly bitterness. He turned his cold eyes on me.

"Let us have done with heroics. I know what has happened and I know also why you are here. But there is no mystery. I spied for Choiseul and he found me useful. I have also had dealings with Goulleau, who is a mere miser and much more fool than knave. Nor are the syndics of the Six Corporations aught but fools; they have let priests play on their superstitious fears. 'Tis known to wiser heads that open trading by Jews has never failed to make a town or a country more prosperous. There are men about the King who know how London and Amsterdam have thriven. Choiseul, moreover, is about to be disgraced and banished to ten leagues from the Court. Consequently I do not think that the petition of the Corporations will meet with the King's favor unless they bribe the woman Du Barry."

I determined to test and use the man's knowledge.

"What do you think the Jews should do?"

He looked at me contemptuously.

"Offer a larger bribe. Do they need to be told that?"

"'Tis well," I said and prepared to go.

His long, bony forefinger touched my shoulder.

"I will tell you once again and for the last time that nothing matters now and today and in this kingdom, neither the words of the philosophers nor the edicts of

Louis Bourbon nor the rise and fall of nobles. Nor does it matter whether the Jews trade openly or not."

He waved his arm with all the knotted fingers of his hand outspread.

"All this will burn—burn to ashes. It will not last another generation. The torches are lit; the executioners are born; the necks are ripe."

He laughed a strange, triumphant and yet melancholy laugh.

I looked him full in the face.

"Valdes, you are a Jew. Tell me your thought. What will become of us?"

He threw up both hands now and lifted his head.

"There will be neither Jew nor gentile. There will be only men. The burden will be lifted and the curse will die."

"Is it a burden and a curse?" I asked.

Again he laughed but now contemptuously. "What else? What else?"

I bowed my head. The man's grief-stricken exultation filled me with sorrow. I saw my grandfather's face as I had seen it an hour since and heard his venerable voice. Where was the truth in this matter? Certainly somewhere between my grandfather's noble aloofness and this man's destructiveness and despair. . . . So I considered on that far day of my youth and once more thought of the words of the philosophers concerning tolerance and humanity, and hastened home and helped my father gather the elders of the three congregations to meet in our synagogue at midnight in order that, if all agreed, horsemen could start at dawn to Bordeaux and Metz and other cities to gather a sum wherewith to ransom our new-found freedom.

Chapter Four

At this point there are gaps of two kinds in the manuscript of the memoirs of Jehoshu'a ben Mordechai Vidal of Avignon. There is a gap caused by the damage or disappearance of eleven pages; there is a gap in the narrative itself. Instead of continuing to tell his story, Vidal set down a series of memoranda. From this fact it may be inferred that Vidal did not have an opportunity to revise his story. Perhaps he hoped it to be returned to him from Strasbourg. But the Revolution came, and it never was.

The memoranda he left are, however, precious and illuminating. He saw the Abbé Guené, the author of the recently published "Letters of Some Portuguese and German Jews to Monsieur de Voltaire." He found him in a small room cluttered with books, dressed in an old soutane stained with snuff, a tall, pale ascetic with warm, wise eyes. Guené was brightly sure of the early emancipation of both Jews and Protestants; he read to Joshua the letter which Voltaire had written to Isaac de Pinto: "The sentences of mine which you find objectionable were indeed bitter and unjust. Assuredly there are cultivated and honorable men among your fellow Jews.

Your letter itself bears witness to that fact. I shall take pains to revise those sentences in the next edition of my book. My error was to impute to an entire people the vices of individuals." In addition Guené introduced Vidal to a certain Professor of the Sorbonne named Ladvoat, who had been the first to criticize on scholarly and historical grounds the attack of Voltaire on the Jewish people. Vidal has a short note: "Guené advised the congregations to send Ladvoat to plead before the King's Ministers that the petition of the Corporations of the merchants and tradesmen of Paris be refused."

Whether this was done does not appear. Nor does it appear whether the Jews of Paris bribed or sought to bribe either Madame d'Aubigny or the Comtesse du Barry. Since no historian or chronicler records any convulsion within the small Jewish community of Paris at this period, it may be assumed that the petition transmitted to the King by the Comte de Saint-Florentin and his department of State papers had no practical effect.

Joshua Vidal, moreover, had his own private preoccupations. He tried his hand at French verses:

"O sombre grottos, happy places,
All pomp and falseness far above,
Where happiness gently embraces
Oneness of Nature and of Love."*

The most significant memorandum of this period is one in which Vidal seeks to recall once more the exact words of Cerfberr of Strasbourg concerning that play-

* Grottes sombres, lieux fortunés,
Où loin du faste et loin de l'imposture
Par le bonheur doucement enchaînés
Sont a jamais unis l'Amour et la Nature.

wright who had depicted the character of an honorable and unselfish Jew and of that playwright's Jewish friend, one Moses Mendelssohn. He began, then, to entertain the idea that it was elsewhere than in France that the actual emancipation might be on the march, despite the fact that the French thinkers of the age had been those who had created for all of Europe, for all of mankind, the very notions of institutional injustice, of tolerance and of freedom.

Memoranda are found, in addition, on the possibility of emigration to the West Indian island of Martinique. Here, Vidal discovered, a prosperous Jewish colony had been banished less than a century ago. Louis XIV had first given these Jews in Martinique equal rights with the other colonists. Fourteen years later he had issued a decree called the Black Code by which they and all they had accomplished were destroyed. A banker of Bordeaux, named David Gradis, was even now preparing a new Jewish colonization of Martinique; Gradis seemed, so far as Vidal could discover, to be favored in his project by the Court. But he writes in almost a new vein for him: "If I leave Europe I would tread a virgin soil, not one already soaked first by the honorable sweat, later by the undeserved tears of Israel." His heart, moreover, kept him at home. He rarely mentions dates, and so it is not clear how long he remained in Paris before his return to Versailles. The last entry that can be deciphered is: "Choiseul banished." No more than two pages are now missing before, on the fourth line of the next page, a continuous narrative begins again.

. . . Olivier almost trembled, so rapidly did his narrow red head bob up and down. Questions were unnecessary.

He was full to the point of bursting. "Of course the chateau is dark and empty, as Monsieur observed. The Comte in his desperate situation quarreled with the Duc de Choiseul because he hoped to save himself from falling with the Duc. But there was no chance. He was Choiseul's creature and the Du Barry knew it and His Majesty knew it and the Comte was deprived of all offices and emoluments a day before the decree of banishment against Monseigneur, the Duc de Choiseul, was even issued. The Comte, I am told, commanded the Comtesse to go and throw herself at Madame du Barry's feet and plead for her husband. But this the Comtesse—hee-hee-hee—refused to do."

"Is that not melancholy rather than amusing?" I asked.

"I beg Monsieur le Chevalier's pardon. The domestics all rejoiced in the Comtesse's courage and self-respect."

"What happened next?"

"Ah, what happened next was sad. Goulleau appeared with a mortgage paper and with a string of carts. He emptied the house. He did not leave the Comte and Comtesse a chair or a bed. He demanded the keys of the Chateau and locked it. There they stood, he dragging his leg, she pale and strange-looking and her unpowdered black hair fluttering in the wind."

"My God," I cried. "Did you not offer them shelter here?"

"I would have done so, Monsieur, but the Comte, it would appear, had sent a message to Madame de Moncrif, who came in a hired coach and fetched him and the Comtesse to her house."

I sprang up. "So they are there?"

"No more. No longer. They obtained, I know not

how, a coach and horses and a coachman, and drove off, I am told, to a place many, many leagues from here, a place with an odd name."

"Can you remember the name?"

"Dieu-le-fit—hee-hee-hee?"

A great sadness came over me. Doubtless there was some house on or near those ancestral acres against which I had lent Saint-Florentin the hundred thousand livres. Thither he had taken Marguerite. Once more, as in her girlhood, she was in rude wilds. And now she was there with that bitter, stricken, vain old man who, for a few years, had shown her the glitter and the vanities of the world. There she was in a forlornness more grievous and tragical by reason of the love which she and I had known. My heart lay in my breast like a cold inert stone. My mind, gliding futilely from wretched thought to thought, from gray impulse to gray impulse, chose an immediate act.

I said almost to myself: "I must see Madame de Moncrif."

I had almost forgotten that Olivier was still there. With a curious smile he faced me.

"Madame de Moncrif accompanied the Comte and Comtesse on their travels. Her house here is to let."

I sprang up in the very extremity of love and longing and compassion. I knew not what aid I could bring to Marguerite; I knew not with what light I could lighten her darkness, except this: she should know that I had not forgotten and would never forget, that one heart beat for her and only for her in this desolate world. Whatever the end, whatever the future—of this thing she should be sure. I knew well that it might have been a greater kindness to have sent her as her own the deed

I held on her husband's lands and thus make her more mistress of the situation and to write her that barriers which no man could cross stood between her and me. But I was young and already high hopes had failed me; already I saw life in bleaker hues than I had done only a year before. If we were to part, as part we must, I desired to see her, touch her, hear her at least once again and speak to her some word of love that would accompany her on the long, chill road of life. Also, my mind came to the aid of my impassioned desire. If my dark suspicions were true, perhaps I could break the power or dull the cruelty of the Moncrif woman. I had seen the black revengefulness in her eyes; I had heard it in her voice. Never for a moment had she forgiven Saint-Florentin for marrying Marguerite. But to him, her ancient lover, she was bound by ties of memory and of interest. Her fury was directed against Marguerite, the innocent cause of her discomfiture. Nor was the Comte any longer strong enough in either body or mind to protect his young wife. His murdered vanity would make him cringe; he had been upheld by station, glitter, the shows and pomps of the world. I had seen his spirit grovel for an instant before Goulleau. In his crippled estate, crippled in body, pride, means, he was capable of sacrificing Marguerite for a flattering speech or a dish of pheasants. I had a vision of those three that made my heart faint with fear and rage.

None knew better than I how long a journey was before me. For the village of Dieu-le-fit is situated but two-score of leagues above our ancient community of Carpentras, one of the four Congregations of the Papal county of Venaissin, in which my father's kin and clan had dwelt for many generations. Carpentras is but a two

hours' ride on a good horse from the dark multitudinous fountain of Vaucluse and thence a man, riding in a south-westerly direction, can make Avignon, the city of my birth, in a winter's day. Therefore, it behooved me to set my affairs somewhat in order.

One thing I knew. I would return here no more. Olivier, when I told him of my decision, fell hypocritically at my feet. Would I take him with me? Never again would he have so kind and noble a master. I was condemning him to beggary. The man revolted me. I gave him a handful of coins beyond his wage and told him I would commend him to the man who would sell the house once again. Pierre, the footman, was not sorry to be discharged. He said the country had wearied him. He would seek service with some gay lady in town. Grégoire, the coachman, could not be found. I had had a suspicion for long that he was a creature of Valdes.

In Paris, in his useless curiosity shop, mere blind for his real business, I taxed Valdes with the fact. He laughed his acrid laugh.

"Grégoire is from Muscovy. Cossacks fell upon way-faring Jews and tortured the men with whips and made sport with the women. So Grégoire was born, hated by the man who had to father him and by the mother who bore him. 'Tis not a gay world, Monsieur de Vidal."

"The Muscovites are barbarians," I replied. "Such things can never again happen in the western part of Europe where even thrones are occupied by philosophers."

Valdes looked beyond me out of those bony hollows that held his eyes.

"Now in the matter of the house. I will not deny that I have a customer for it. Maître Goulleau, who now

owns the estate of Saint-Florentin in fact, as he has long done in law, has a hunger to add estate to estate in Versailles while he grudges himself fresh bread at home. He is a sharp, shrewd bargainer."

I was impatient to be gone and not too ill content to lose but one fourth of the sum I had paid. It had come to me in watches of the night even then that I would not follow in the footsteps of my father or my kinsmen, that I would not marry nor found a house nor beget sons and daughters; that I would be a wanderer upon the earth. If I husbanded from now on what was left of the heritage I had received from my mother, it would suffice me. And an even darker vision which then I understood but ill came to me: perhaps poverty was one of the roads to truth; perhaps it was needful to be among the poor of Israel and of the peoples to know how the world was to be redeemed. I shuddered, I confess. But the vision haunted me.

My father, grateful that I had become neither renegade nor reformer, pressed me no more in the matter of my marriage, though he groaned at the affront offered to the house of De Leon. He gazed at me long, but asked no question when I said that I must set out on a long journey south and would be glad, my own errand being accomplished, to transact for him any affairs that he might have in the four ancient communities of Venaisin. And so, indeed, he charged me with secret messages to the brethren of Avignon, bidding them as a matter of prudence not to crowd too hastily into the communities of Bordeaux or even Montpellier until the artificial hue and cry over the fact which all the world knew, namely this, that the "Portuguese merchants" were Jews and had in truth never been aught else, had died down of its own untimely folly.

There were few diligences in those days, although the King's post was carried well enough, and the best way for a man to travel was on horseback. If he had a bag of money and was armed, he had little to fear. For in the meanest town there was an inn where he could lie not too hard and be fed not too coarsely. I had to journey a matter of over four hundred leagues and even though I stopped to rest for more than a night in Troyes and Dijon and Lyon and also, if I could restrain myself, at Montélimar, yet I reckoned that I should reach my goal within a fortnight.

Though I set out with a heavy enough heart, I could not but take delight in the beauty of the land of France. Many of the roads were lined with noble trees; the vineyards in this late summer weather were heavy with the purple or golden clusters of the grape; the lustrous wheat billowed in the wind. The villages were white and tranquil; there were whirring, willow-hidden mills beside shadowy, rushing streams; there were the walls and turrets and antique streets of town after famous town. At Troyes, where I lay for two nights, my thoughts turned to the great Rashi who passed his youth here and meditated at least those mighty commentaries on *Torah* and *Talmud* that have been the light of many generations; I thought of our holy martyrs who had suffered here aforetime and rejoiced in the belief that at least this extreme of cruelty and cruel suffering would never again blacken the annals of the world.

From Troyes I rode through the gentle Burgundian hills. There were great dishes to be eaten and great wines to be drunk at every inn. I had conquered my horror of *treifah* food at that time, and youth and robust health and a hard day's riding inclined me to take delight in these comfortable gifts of God. There was an inn housed

in an old, old turreted house in the city of Dijon called the Inn of the Golden Pheasant where, despite the urgency of my journey, I was almost tempted to linger for food and wine and white lavendered sheets and the sweetness and courtesy of the folk of Burgundy. And 'twas a strange thought—yet one that would come unbidden to me at the oddest moments—that these people who had never seen a Jew—and so received neither kindness from one nor unkindness—would nevertheless, did I reveal myself to them, turn from me with fear and horror.

At last my horse's hoofs clattered over the great stone bridge that spans the Rhone at Lyon and divides the city into two. Now day by day I approached nearer the country of my youth. Cypresses and olive trees appeared and the land was full of flowers. White were the roads and white the rocks, and one day a fierce and dusty mistral cast me into a great depth of despair. Yet was even this not unpleasing to me and I wondered greatly at a man's attachment to the landscape of his childhood and boyhood, even though the people of the land held him to be a stranger and an outcast and sought to put him to perpetual shame by a patch upon his garment or a yellow hat upon his head. And here was I, once one of the yellow-hatted tribe of the Papal state, and still an outcast riding, like one of the Christian knights of old, to rescue, or at least alleviate, the fate of a Christian lady whom I loved and who loved me. And, though my heart was full of tears at the strangeness and the tragedy of life, my lips laughed as on a sun-drenched morning I set out on the last day's riding of my journey toward the town of Montélimar.

Chapter Five

THE village of Dieu-le-fît stands on the edge of a plateau of chalk and limestone. There are both grainfields and vineyards round about; yet the land here has a touch of wildness, for the high Alps are not many leagues to the north-east nor the rough Cévennes mountains many leagues to the north-west. The earth slopes down toward Provence and the Midland sea, but it slopes down as with the vast billowings of the ocean. I had set out from Montélimar before dawn and the day was not yet hot when I dismounted in the public square of the village which runs to the plateau's sharp edge.

The square is in truth semi-circular: from every window of the half-circle of houses there is a free view of the deep valley, dotted with villages and forests and ancient hunting-towers, at the foot of the plateau. But the people who lived in these tall whitish old houses had, it would appear, none of the love of either the awful or the pastoral aspects of Nature which beat in those days in every thoughtful breast. The wooden shutters, with their heart-shaped or lily-shaped apertures, were closed as tightly as though they never had been opened. 'Tis true that the sun beat even now upon these houses.

Yet they had the look of blind and stealthy monsters and, seeing that beside these houses the village consisted but of hovels of the meanest sort, my heart contracted at the certainty that in the dank or dusty chill of one of these buildings Marguerite drew her soft and solitary breath.

I was considering that it behooved me to seek an inn, when the door of the house in the center of the semi-circle opened and out of it and down the two hollowed stone steps hobbled in an old brown coat, leaning on two sticks, Gaston de Saint-Florentin. A greasy manicolored kerchief muffled his wig-less head; the buckles of his shoes were open and the straps flapped and dragged; a soiled shirt without ruffles was open at the dewlapped throat. His head was bent but his lids were wide open and the eyes, half conciliatory and half cold, bitter and afraid, gazed straight at me. He hobbled forward as I hastened to meet him.

"You have come, I would suppose," he said, "to drive me out of my last refuge. But I will pay you interest; these farms are producing not ill, not ill."

There was something grimly pitiful in the man's fallen estate.

"I want neither principal nor interest, Monsieur," I said quickly. "My own affairs took me to both Carpentras and Montélimar and, hearing that you had retired here, I thought to pay my respects to you and the Comtesse."

Something of his old puffed-up artificial dignity came back to him. He waved one of his two sticks.

"A handsome thought. We saw you through a slit in the shutters. Enter my house."

"Perhaps I should look for an inn," I said.

He drew himself up as best he could. "That you shall not do. I cannot offer you the domestics or the repasts of other days. But simple country fare has its charms as I always believed and have now discovered for myself. And there are many rooms in these old houses and, though there is no groom to help you, there is a good stable for your horse."

I acquiesced with a tightening of the heart. But he was in no hurry to enter. He laid his hand on my arm.

"Is it not well that I was ever a lover of Nature and simplicity? For the world is ungrateful. What services have I not rendered my king and my country? Forgotten! Forgotten! Choiseul in his day had no better friend than I; he scrupled not to make public our alliance, though he himself had broken it, so that I might be certain to share his fall and his disgrace! I raised Goulleau, a creature of the gutter, to an estate he never dreamed of reaching: slowly, stealthily he plotted to destroy me."

"It is, indeed, tragical," I agreed.

And so it was for him, seeing that he believed what he said and sincerely looked upon himself as a good man who had been wronged and who now bore his misfortunes with a becoming dignity and courage.

At last we were at the door and entered a dim, cool, musty hallway and thence a room a little brighter, in which on an old oaken table was spread the midday meal: a stew of birds, goat's cheese, large round loaves of bread, and pewter tankards of a white country wine. The Comte tapped on the rude floor with one of his sticks and Marguerite came slowly in. She looked girl-ish and young, younger than ever, in a white frock and black unpowdered hair, yet frail withal. The beauty of the bones of her face was enough to break the heart.

She lifted those long blue eyes of hers and from them streamed to me a world of love and gratitude. I had not forgotten; I had come to seek her out. She spoke no word but gave me both her hands with a frank, unashamed gesture. She left her hands in mine until we heard the Comte's testy voice.

"I am hungry and doubtless so is Monsieur de Vidal after his long ride. Where is Lisette?"

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders gently.

"How should I know? She does not honor me with her confidence."

Saint-Florentin looked up suddenly. My coming had given Marguerite courage to speak her mind. His face turned pink. He fought down the rising rage that might so easily kill him. He sat down and beat upon the floor with his stick. The house shook a very little under footsteps that now came down the creaking wooden stairs. Lisette de Moncrif came in formally dressed in a robe of scarlet taffeta trimmed with lace and tall powdered hairdress and jewelled fingers. She curtsied half-mockingly.

"I liked not to appear, Gaston, before a visitor from the great world dressed like a milkmaid."

Her green, oblique, contemptuous glance brushed Marguerite.

I saluted Madame de Moncrif. We took our seats at the board.

And now there began to unfold itself the drama that was happening in this rustic house, in this remote village, far from the courts and camps of the great world. There were no robes nor candles; yet 'twas like one of the solemn tragedies that I had heard spoken in panoplied verse upon the stage. Lisette de Moncrif was but

a plump, small, white-skinned woman of forty with eyes that could change from a pleasing gray to a stinging green; her full lips could curve like Cupid's bows and then swell and broaden as though they concealed the fangs of a Fury. Her whole being was given over to the task of a long-delayed revenge for real or fancied ills that she had suffered. Her speech—I could not help remembering the passage from our scripture—"her speech was smooth as butter but her heart was war."

"How charming," she said, bending toward me, "to see one who comes from the great gay world from which we are forever exiled!"

Saint-Florentin, his mouth full, stopped chewing. He grew pink; he looked like a grotesque and rigid masque carved on the arch of a playhouse.

"I know little of the great world," I replied. "The little that I saw did not seem gay."

"Ah," she cried, "you are but trying to comfort us! Gaston feigns to find pleasure in the pastoral life, though in truth 'tis dull and coarse and dirty. But he is dying of ennui. I try to entertain him as best I can. It avails little."

The color rose in Marguerite's face. "Why do you not return to the scenes of your youth and your triumphs, Lisette?"

All light seemed suddenly to be sucked out of Madame de Moncrif's face. It became thick and stiff, like the face of a pig. She struck the table with a blunt, stubby, small hand.

"How am I to return and wherewith? Where is my youth? Ruined by Gaston? Where is my fortune? Lost by him with wenches and at gaming-tables of the brothels of Paris. Now I am old and fat and ugly. Perhaps,

Madame, you would want me to haunt the Tuileries after dusk? Have you not injured me enough without driving me to that extremity?"

She sank, trembling, back into her chair. Saint-Flor-entin had swallowed his food. He was pale now. His eyes fled from mine. Yet his words were addressed to me.

"'Tis but the spleen that tortures now one of us, Monsieur de Vidal, now another. I could be content with elegant studies and philosophic thoughts. The great have fallen before. But women—ah, they are weak."

Marguerite with a great free gesture laid her hand upon my arm.

"He lies. He hates this life. Yet that is but a small matter. I do not love him; I have no cause to love him. But it seems hard that Lisette, feigning still to love him, should torture and humiliate him by day and by night."

Lisette laughed a sudden half-lecherous, half-foolish laugh. "By night, Madame? What good is he by night any more?"

Marguerite drew herself up slowly. Then she arose.

"I shall not stay to hear your ribald talk." She turned to me. "'Tis a sad house you have come to, my friend."

Her leaving of the room was a beautiful thing. Her walk and gesture were not, as well they might have been, those of an injured and self-pitying woman. Her steps were full of dignity and grace.

Lisette seemed to sink into a brooding absorption with herself.

"I would offer you the hospitality of my small house in Versailles, Monsieur," I said to the Comte. "Alas, I have sold it. Have you not other friends, friends at Court?"

Could not the King himself be persuaded to recall you?"

Saint-Florentin's once jaunty head drooped pitifully.

"I have no friends. No one has friends. Men, as the great La Rochefoucauld declared, are not displeased at the misfortunes of others. These do but illuminate their own power and splendor. Moreover, we hate those whom we have injured. And who has not inflicted injury even though only in seeking to avert it?"

"'Tis a melancholy picture you paint," I said.

He looked up and faced me at last. He took a deep breath.

"You are right. I have come to see the vanities of the world in their true nature. You may believe me. I was tempted to talk even to the curé of the village. But he is an unlettered hind who knows nothing but his *pater* and his *ave*."

A bitter laugh came from Lisette de Moncrif. "A fine thing for a philosopher—to consort with priests!"

Saint-Florentin quivered as under a whip. Then, seemingly encouraged by my presence, he said in a dull stubborn voice, "I shall talk to the curé if I have a mind to."

Lisette sprang up. She shook with sudden rage.

"Fool! Lecher! Thief! Oh, how it delights me to see you brought so low! I spit upon you!"

She gathered her huge billowing skirt in both hands and ran with hops, half-childish and half-maniacal out of the room.

The eyes of Saint-Florentin asked for compassion.

"Can you not turn her out?" I asked.

He shook his head. "She has no place to go. It is true that she gave me her youth and love and fortune. It is true that I used her cruelly and ill. At least, those are the words we use."

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“One could also say that she clung to me long after I desired her no more, that she thrust ducats into my hands when she knew I was in need of money in order to bind me to her by gratitude in the failure of passion and of tenderness. One might say many things. It is because I have had time to consider these things that I went to the curé. But he is a peasant and a blockhead.”

A heavy silence fell between us. If I had ever been jealous of the man or angry at him I was so no more. How was he, foreseeing the estate to which he could be brought, to be expected not to want the reward offered by the Corporations of the merchants and tradesmen of Paris? How was he to be expected not to desire to save himself at the expense of a handful of strange and alien creatures to whom he was bound by nothing in the whole world? When he prated in his good rich days of humanity and tolerance he might, after a fashion, even have meant what he said. But pain and terror are stronger things than words or handsome sentiments. A man in pain or terror is not likely to be moved by considerations of justice or of equity.

He had almost fallen into a doze. He roused himself.

“I cannot climb the stairs,” he said. “I sleep in the next room. If you will mount to the third storey, you will find a clean, large, empty chamber. There is an old serving-woman from one of the farms who waits on us. So, at least, the house is clean.”

I climbed the stairs and found at their head a large and airy room. In the middle of it stood Marguerite, spreading fresh sheets upon a large, old curtained bed. She turned slowly and then came to meet me.

“At last we shall be able to sleep together in a bed,

Jean, and wake up together and hear the twittering of the morning birds together. Nay, my friend, say nothing, I implore you. Say not, above all, that you can stay here only so and so long! You will stay this night, will you not?"

"I will stay."

"Then we will have that. Or, at least, I will. One day, one night!"

Her head was on my shoulder and her hot tears stung my face and neck. Love and compassion broke me and I mingled my tears with hers.

"You still love me, Jean?"

"Yes, and I think that I will always love you, although —"

"Say nothing of the world; say nothing of parting. Not now, my friend, not yet!"

She withdrew herself from my arms and continued to prepare the bed and the room.

"Look," she said without stopping or even turning to me, "look, 'tis my bridal chamber. The only one I have had or ever shall have. Are you not glad you came?"

"With all my heart. Did you not know that I would come?"

"Deep, deep in my soul I thought I knew. Yet in my ears I heard the words that men and women speak. You know them?"

"What words?"

"That when a man has had his will of a woman he grows indifferent."

"Do you believe that?"

She laughed a light little laugh. "I know so little of men and of the world. The tales told by the friends of Gaston, the great gentlemen and the great ladies, are

all of cold and lecherous gallantry. And my father and my cousins in Auvergne hunted the country wenches as they hunted deer or bear—to make a killing.”

“I am not like that,” I said softly.

“No, you are not. What a pity you are rich and a great gentleman too. I wish you were a gypsy and that we two could live in a tent under the stars.”

“Would that I were!” I cried. “Would you leave him?”

She stopped. She turned. “Why should I not? In truth I have been sorry for him since his fall. But now I am of no use to him. If I were gone, I think Lisette would treat him gently. ’Tis her terrible jealousy that tortures her. I have often wished that he had married her instead of me.”

“Yet then you would have been lost in the wilds of Auvergne.”

“And I would never have met you, Jean. ’Tis no use wishing; ’tis no use hoping. Life, I have come to think, is very hard and cruel.”

Tears came into her eyes but she brushed them quickly away. “I will not grieve nor repine. I will have time enough for that when you are gone.”

A darkness fell upon my spirit. Across the many years I can feel that palpable darkness and pang of deep despair. To have fled with her then, to have saved her, to have made her happy! It could not have been! The world is too strong for us and duty is too compelling, and of the pressure of the world and of the command of duty is our fate woven.

She stood before me, her task completed. Her face was blithe.

"Do you know what would be beautiful?" she asked.
"Tell me!"

"If I conceived tonight and had your child to bear and tend."

"You would dare?"

She drew herself up and laid her hands on my shoulders. "Why should I not? I would say it was Gaston's. His vanity would never permit him to deny that, even if it were impossible. He cannot cast me forth. There are a thousand wrongs he did me that I can prove. He keeps his mistress in the house; he never paid my father the promised money. Oh, I could tell a tale as well as Lisette!"

She laughed suddenly. "Do not look so dismayed, my poor Jean. All women can fight for their deep needs. All!"

She led me from that chamber and down the stairs of the now silent house and out through a thickly tangled narrow garden to a small broken gate. Beyond the gate stretched a long sweep of the plateau toward a group of hillocks at the end of the vista. Far beyond, she told me, lay the forests and fields and vineyards. But this level stretch of the plateau was the place she loved. Here she walked; here she ran under the stars or even in the rain when she could no more bear the throbbing of contending wills and dying passions in the close, dusty house. Here wind and sun and starlight seemed to cleanse her. By night she came here often when Gaston and Lisette sat at cards by a single candle and over a pitcher of country wine.

She gathered up her skirts in her right hand.

"Let us pretend we are fleeing! Race me to the hills!"

We sped across that bright unshadowed plain under

a westering sun. She stretched out her hand and I took it and thus, hand in hand, we ran and heard the taut wind murmuring past our ears. We seemed to be running away from earth and straight into the sky, where a few tufted clouds traveled with us. Care fell from me; destiny died. We had those minutes of entire and winged freedom between earth and sky. I have remembered them to this day.

We reached the hillocks and stopped. She turned a glowing face to me. "This is my great place of refuge. There are caves in these small limestone hills, very ancient, shallow caves. 'Tis said that hermits lived in them long, long ago. Sometimes when the sun is hot and I need to flee from the house I hide here in a cave."

"You are not afraid?"

"I grew up in the mountains. There is nothing here to fear. Come, Jean."

She guided me to a cleft in the living rock. It led to a rude natural arch beyond which gaped the cave. We entered. By the dim but sufficient light I saw tall letters scrawled in an antique hand upon the wall of the cave. I approached the wall and slowly deciphered the huge irregular letters: "*Je suis Abraham le fou!* I am Abraham the madman!"* Most strange and fatal words to find here: signal of destiny, shadows of doom.

"The cave chills me," I said. "Let us go, my beloved."

She spread her hands across my breast as though to shield me from the chill. We stepped forth into the open and slowly, tacitly, arm in arm, wandered back to the house.

* The inscription which Vidal describes is in a sixteenth-century hand and still existed in a small cave near Dieu-le-fit in 1930.

Chapter Six

SUMMER winds blew across the plateau on which stood the village of Dieu-le-fît, and the days were beautiful to us. Amid tufted woods on the northern slope there was a deserted hunting lodge of one of the kings of the house of Valois, a Francis or an Henri, Marguerite knew not which. But had she not, she asked archly, a kind of right to use this lodge for herself and her beloved? At dawn almost she brought cushions to the lodge, which was not ill preserved, and a few plates of Sèvres from which we ate, and here, she said, we were a banished prince and princess and still cared little for our banishment and regretted no pomp and no splendor since we were still together. She brought her old poetry books, too, which she had ever loved, though they were quite gone out of fashion, and together we read the deep sweet lilting verses of Maître Pierre Ronsard.

This world of fancy was a new world to me. It was a shimmering Garden of Eden and I knew not at first whether I dared even for an hour to be at ease in it. But Marguerite put her cool hand on my forehead.

"Do not be troubled beyond need. Have we not these days? Are they not good days? They will come to an end,

I know. But now they are here and we are together and the sun is shining and we shall have them to remember."

I knew that she was right and yet I could not always fall in with this rightness of hers. In jest I called her a pagan and knew not in those days how falsely I spoke even though she was closer than I to earth and Nature, and less troubled, despite her sorrows, by the twin calls of duty and of doom. Love and delight and the harmony between us often made me forget—or almost forget—the past, the future and the strangeness of fate. But only briefly and never wholly. My soul could not consent to division and incompleteness, nor to the transitory charm of perishing days. What did I want? The unattainable: her whom my whole heart loved but also my people and my God and my resolve, nurtured so long and executed so ill, to advance the march of freedom among men. She felt, indeed—for in strange ways her soul knew mine—the desperate fierceness with which I pressed her to me as though I were striving to wring eternity from the fleeting moment and to stamp oneness upon the confusions of our fate.

At best our beautiful hours, whether by day in that abandoned lodge in the forest or by night in my hushed chamber, were islands in a troubled, bitter water. For though Marguerite felt that she owed no duty to the broken rancorous man who was her husband and who sat in that dusty house quarreling with his mistress, yet were those two there. Two pairs of eyes watched us: Gaston de Saint-Florentin's, with the mounting hatred of what he conceived to be his last humiliation and final proof of his loss of all power; Lisette's, stony and green and cruel with a devouring jealousy. I asked Marguerite

why the woman, now once more almost alone with Gaston, should fall into passions so horrifying? Did she not now have what she wanted? Marguerite laughed and called me an innocent who little knew the ways of her sex. "Lisette no longer either loves or desires him. They were never friends nor was there any kindness of the heart between them. There were lust and pride and the power of possession. Now they hate each other for the injuries that each has inflicted on the other. Yet each would feel diminished by losing the other. Gaston desires still to believe that he has a handsome mistress; Lisette desires to torture him not only to revenge herself but to prove to herself that she still has power. But now every weapon has fallen from her hand. She cannot humble me; for I have you. I am now triumphant. For there is no thing that can make a woman triumphant save a man's love, and Gaston suffers through me and not through her." Marguerite's eyes grew dark and glowed. "One thing only could assuage Lisette's hatred of us and horror of herself. If she could win you!"

I laughed but Marguerite was very grave. "She has no other way of uncoiling the very snakes that throttle her. Gaston can no longer love her nor can he—and this might ease her—challenge you to fight him and drive you forth." Marguerite clasped her hands. "Yet there is one thing that would soften her were she not, as I have long known, a very fury."

"What is that thing?" I asked.

She turned a little from me.

"That I will be left forlorn soon enough! Oh, do not think that I reproach you, Jean! It is not in my heart to reproach you for anything! I do not think I ever could. But the thing is so." She turned toward me with

a melancholy little smile. "Yet how can she be so sure? Perhaps she isn't. *Let her be vexed then. She is a very cruel woman and has been very cruel to me.*"

A silence fell between us, the first empty silence of these good days.

"It is not my desire ever to leave you," I said.

She looked at me long and tenderly. "I did not ask you to say that, though I think it is true. There is not much happy love in the world. And ours is happy. But men must follow their destiny."

These things were spoken between us one day at dusk as the sun was setting far to our right over the invisible western sea. We were returning from our lodge through the forest, for we made it a practice to return to the house for dinner. We needed warm food once a day; we did not, though we had spoken no words on the matter, desire to break wholly the seemly show of life.

Gaston and Lisette were already at table. He pretended no longer to take any care of his person. He sat in his long grey frayed waistcoat and a dingy shirt; Lisette too rarely put on her finery now. The day had been warm and she had on a green robe imperfectly fastened, so that she was naked in front almost to the navel and also showed her plump white not unshapely shoulders. As we came in I followed Marguerite's glance under the table and saw that Lisette's stockings had slipped down and made thick bunches around her ankles.

'Twas Lisette who spoke as we sat down. "How charming of the two lovers to join us!"

She contorted her face into a smile, but her eyes did not smile. They were cold and tormented and dull at the same time.

Gaston de Saint-Florentin threw down his knife and fork. They clattered against his plate.

"You will have the goodness, Madame, not to affront either my wife or our guest."

I understood him not without compassion. Thus and thus only did he hope to preserve his pride. But Lisette hated him too bitterly to let him feign. She answered his rebuke with a laugh: the odd silvery trill of a singer laughing in some cold comedy amid the artifices of the stage and yet deliberately tinging the cold trill of that laugh with the extremity of hatred, jealousy and rage.

"La, la, la! The last refuge of the cuckold—the impotent cuckold! 'My wife and our guest!' This is your country wench after whose virginity you lusted and whose simplicity was to ensure you domestic peace. The very words he spoke!" She had the mad and perverse audacity to turn to me as though for confirmation. "And you, too, probably think that this is Madame's first adultery and you too are very proud of yourself. Men are such swine and such fools. I have had my suspicions of our quiet lady for long. Else do you think a woman of my station and my gifts would concern herself still with that poor hunk of what was once a man? But he has been wronged! I loved him once and sorrow over him now."

She wept. She succeeded in shedding tears. But there was no more grief in her tears than there had been mirth in her laughter.

The woman's imputation stung to my vitals. "Madame," I cried, "if Monsieur de Saint-Florentin will not defend this lady against your insults, I will!"

Marguerite laid her hand on my arm. I turned to

her. She looked at me with a smile of indescribable love and trust, and yet the smile was a little the smile of a woman to a headstrong child.

"Do not let her trouble you, my friend. Look, she is really poor; she has been stripped of all the vanities of life and she has never known love."

Lisette sprang to her feet, as a sickly red suffused the quivering lowered face of Saint-Florentin.

"I poor?" Lisette cried. "I stripped of vanities? I, who was the most renowned beauty and constant toast of town and Court but the other day? I, who am still not old and still beautiful and noted for my wit and sparkle? I have not known love? Ha! Why do I bury myself here in this outrageous filthy village but for the unselfishness of my devotion, a quality for which I have been ever known and which has brought me to this point where a country wench from Auvergne can affront me and be aided and abetted by a fellow who comes from no one knows where! I have consulted almanachs, M. de Vidal—it is chevalier, is it not?—that deal with the nobility and gentry of this kingdom and I find no mention of the name or estate or escutcheon of a family called Vidal. Who are you? What are you? An escaped thief? A successful gamester?"

"For God's sake, Lisette!" Saint-Florentin's whisper was hoarse, desperate. "He owns this very house; these very fields. He can turn us out to beg!"

"You, perhaps—not me!" Her voice rose to a shriek. "My patience is at an end. I can bear no more. In the morning I shall send to Montèlimar for a coach-and-four." Again she laughed that false, dry, silvery laugh.

"If I can do no other, I can always sell myself in a better market."

Her green robe wildly flying behind her, she ran from the room, and we heard the clatter, heavier than her weight warranted, of her hard high heels on the bare wooden stairs.

I sat there with a sudden knife, as it were, in my vitals. Discovery and exposure! Blindly I had forgotten that possibility. Forgotten? Perhaps not wholly. But with Marguerite I had lost all sense of being in an alien world. She and I were in an accord, as the accord between viol and lute, as between clavier and cello, which silenced for us the dissonances of the world. I looked up; I looked at her. She smiled and bravely, openly, laid her hand on mine.

Then she turned to Saint-Florentin. "My poor Gaston, do you think she will really go?"

He did not lift his eyes. His large face was pale now. He shook his head.

"She would not be received at Court, nor has she the means wherewith to establish herself. There is a half-ruined chateau of the Moncrifs on the Norman coast near Honfleur, where they would have to take her in. But it is better here and she knows it."

Marguerite smiled a strange subtle smile.

"And in truth you would not have her go; you would at the last moment beg her to stay, would you not?"

Gaston de Saint-Florentin looked up. Something of his former dignity was in his gesture and his glance.

"The poets tell us that the heart of man is very strange. The great Racine has written a line. Do you remember it? '*Je m'abhorre encor plus que tu ne me detestes.*' That is all my story."

Marguerite was grave. "You need have no horror of yourself nor do I detest you. When you married me I did not know what love was. I mistook the word for the thing. You did not either. You never have. But Lisette—ah, you understand her and she understands you. You are to each other witnesses of a former glory, or what seemed such to you both. It is a last comfort for you both to remember and to bemoan your fate."

Heavily Saint-Florentin got up. He grasped the handle of a tall pewter jug of country wine.

"It is less simple than you think. But I am broken with weariness. I am old and not well. I shall drink a deep draught and sleep."

"The physician forbade you to drink wine."

"Would you rob me of my only comfort?"

Suddenly his voice had, in truth, the peculiar whine of the aged. He lifted the jug and, with heavy tread, dragging one leg across the floor, he left the chamber.

The candles flickered. Their flames fluttered like small banners in a light wind that suddenly came in at the heart-shaped slits in the wooden shutters. My throat ached. I wanted to cry out to Marguerite all my soul, all the truth of my life—the name of my people and faith and God. And I knew that it could not be. The heavy centuries had built a wall between us. The horror of the Jew had been ground into the very bones of Christendom. Were I to tell her, she would no longer believe that I was this man she knew and loved. She would believe that she had been in the ban of a goblin, under the spell of an evil sorcery. The very sound of my prayers would be to her a blasphemous incantation. Why did I think of that circumstance now? Why did I yearn now to say: "*Abinu, Malkhenu*—our Father,

our King!" 'Twas the natural cry of my heart's need of help.

I dared at last to look at her. She had been watching me. She smiled now—a wistful, delicate smile, yet one that came from the very depth of her being and suffused her beauty with such goodness that tears came into my eyes.

"Listen, Jean," she said slowly. "I have always known that you are not as other men. Since you are not as other men in your nature, 'tis but right that your destiny should be a strange one too."

Her hands were upon mine, her cool and tender hands. The candles flickered no more. Their flames were now as still as painted flames. By their light her face seemed to emit a faint golden refulgence from within. Her blue eyes were dark but their dark depths glowed. She lifted her head a little with a gesture in which were blended pride and triumph, and consent to fate . . . and resignation, too.

"But I do not ask you—" she continued.

I clasped those firm yet silken hands in my own.

"Do not," I cried. "Do not yet at least! But this I swear to you: My descent is as honorable as any man's you know or have ever known; the little wealth I have was fairly gained. 'Tis true that my fathers were scholars and merchants and knew not the use of the sword. But perhaps the sword is not as glorious among men as once it was. I passed my youth among books; I went out into the world to see whether it was becoming a freer and a better world, and to help it, if I could, to be more so. And at the very gates of that world I saw your face and followed it, and our hearts spoke at

once to each other—did they not, Marguerite, did they not?”

She bent forward and, for a moment, laid her cheek upon my hands that held her own.

I said, “And we loved and trusted each other amid the very darkness and mystery of fate.”

My voice broke. She lifted her head and put her two hands against my cheeks and said: “Do not be so sad, my well-beloved.”

“How should I not be sad? It seems to me that you have become life itself to me. And you are fettered here and I am fettered in circumstance, if not in place, and I know not where in all the world we could find peace or freedom for ourselves.”

“We have had a glimpse of both through our love,” she said. “Perhaps that is all God meant us to have.”

Her whole being seemed to lift itself. There was a gallantry in her resignation which burned my soul, but which I could not equal or even understand. She arose now, and I with her. She stood before me and put her hands on my shoulders.

“Go out into the open for an hour,” she said. “I must be alone now. Then come to me.”

I did her bidding. From almost the beginning on, I was always happy to do her bidding and felt the freer and the safer for that act.

A three-quarter moon rode high in the clear heaven and poured its radiance over the plateau and the wooded valleys round about. It was a silvery world into which I stepped, a still untroubled world. Under its aspect, the tangled passions in that house I had just left suddenly seemed remote, and equally remote and unreal the causes that interposed a very sword of

fire between Marguerite and myself. Here, under this moon, under these stars, upon this height that rose so sheer from the fields and forests, all things seemed possible. We would flee, my beloved and I; it mattered not how alone and solitary we were, if we but had each other. Had either of us found anything in all the world as precious as our love? Would that not serve us to live by?

The moon and stars began visibly, to my eyes, to race across the sky. Though I stood with face uplifted upon a height, my heart suddenly sank and bitterness lay upon my tongue. We could not live with that secret between us forever; no man could live a lying life and not be hurt and torn and, last of all, see his honor crumble. And what if we had children? There would be no place for them upon this many-peopled and strictly divided earth. 'Twas true, I could pretend in some remote village or countryside even like this to be a Frenchman and a Catholic, and buy house and land to sustain us. Had any Jew, I wondered, ever done a like thing? And what, if such an one *had* been, had been his history? I looked no more upon the heavens. I looked upon the earth. I knew. I knew the answer. He would seek peace of heart and have it not; he would lie concerning that to her whom he held in his arms, however devoted and faithful. Terror and shame would be his companions; on every sabbath eve and every sabbath, on every holy, festive or memorial day of his people his soul would be consumed by a foul fire. The word "Jew" uttered in his presence would be to him as a sharp lash and a stinging scorpion, and the tale of any wrong done to any of his people would make his very flesh to wither. Morning would find him throttled

by the words: "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy habitations, O Israel"; the unspoken *Shema'* would make dry and brittle his lips, and evening would bring him a vision of his shame and solitude in the hour of his death.

I knew. And I was young and therefore wept bitter tears on that height in that silvery world. For there was another thing which I had likewise learned: that the heart of man is very lonely. Kinsmen and friends and teachers and comrades fill our world with the pictures of their gestures and the sound of their speech, and leave our inmost being frozen in an eternal solitude. Only love—and even that is rare—only love can penetrate that solitude; only love can give the loneliness of the soul warmth and a human habitation on this place of our pilgrimage. Marguerite had been all alone all her life and I had been alone all my life and now at last we were alone no longer. Yet fate decreed that we should go back to our loneliness—she to hers and I to mine—and dwell in solitariness until we died. Never would any other woman be fair or good in my sight. The heart opens not often; not even twice in the space of a mortal life. And though I was young and very strong, I was gravely minded to pray the Eternal that night that my days be not too greatly prolonged in the world which He had made.

Chapter Seven

LISETTE DE MONCRIF'S round, puffed face wore an expression of astuteness. She had always been addicted to the pleasures of the table, but in the days of what she called her greatness the warnings of her corset-maker had given her pause. Now, as she said, condemned by fate to a peasant's life, she sought no longer to curb her appetite. She sat long and busy at each repast. Between repasts one would meet her coming with a secretive air from that part of the house in which the kitchen was, her two small stubby hands grasping pieces of meat and torn-off bread or soft pasty of rabbit, duck or birds. Thus her white plumpness all but buried her small features, and the conscious look of astuteness, of "Aha, wait and see!" was vastly comical upon that slightly porcine countenance.

I saw all this through the eyes of Marguerite who had a keen gay sense of the humors and oddities of people, and laughed even at her enemies not without kindness. Something, she told me, was in the wind. Lisette had written long letters and sent them by a peasant who drove his cart to market to Montélimar, where the King's post had a station and whence

letters could be despatched to Paris and Versailles. Answers could come by the same route. Lisette had not done that hitherto, preferring not to be reminded of her fine friends. Now she sat scribbling in her room, with her face almost on the paper, and no sooner had she despatched one missive than she would begin another, announcing the fact with much preening and flouncing up and down the stairs, and much mending of the nibs of pens, and complaints of the thickness and color of the ink for which she had sent to Montélimar. 'Twas not what she had been accustomed to as, in truth, nothing was. But she was not one to make trouble, and a turn of the wheel of fortune might still come and restore her to the accustomed graces and elegancies of life.

Marguerite laughed. But I confess that, despite the woman's antics, sometimes comical and sometimes lewd, fear came upon me and I fell to wondering whether, since Marguerite and I must part, 'twere not better to part now before worse had befallen. But this I could not bring myself to do. I pressed each day and each night to my breast, trying to feign to myself that each could be made longer than it was and that each was not hurrying on with unreturning speed to that which must be the last of all.

Lisette's conversation, moreover, at the meal which we all continued to take in common, began to be addressed to me. She smiled on me; she preened before me; she exposed her charms more than was decent for my eyes. Heaven knows I loathed the woman; yet it was easy to see and understand that Marguerite liked it not. We understood the reason, too. It was to be sought in Gaston's confession in the matter of my

claim upon the house and the farms here in Dieu-le-fût. On this one matter Marguerite and I, close as we were, had spoken no word. It had not seemed tolerable to either of us to speak in the same breath of our love and of lands, mortgages, goods and gear.

Lisette, her eyes turning from grey to green, her smile crooked to show a dimple, would turn to me: "How long will you permit Gaston to stay in possession? Is he paying his interest on time?"

"I ask no interest. Let us not speak of the matter."

Then Saint-Florentin was forced to say.

"Monsieur de Vidal has been most generous in his demands."

She turned upon him. The crooked smile was gone. The dull and porcine aspect of her face appeared again.

"What did you do with the borrowed money? 'Tis sure you used none of it to pay even a portion of your debts to me. Did you give it to your wife to hoard?"

Marguerite spoke in a cold voice. "If any had been put into my keeping, Madame, be sure you would have had it."

Surlily, more to me than to the woman, Saint-Florentin said: "What did I do with the borrowed money? What became of all the money. There were thieving cooks and thieving lackeys and tradesmen with bills I had forgotten or had, perhaps, never owed; there were horses and hostlers and carriage-makers and makers of wigs and a corset-maker came, as I remember now, and said you owed her fifty *livres*. And I confess—" he raised his head now in a more manly fashion and turned to me with a gleam of almost his old proud smile—"I confess I had never a great head for figures or the dull keeping of accounts and refused no man what he de-

manded of me, holding it to be more generous and befitting to be cheated than to chaffer and dispute!"

A bitter laugh came from Lisette. This time her voice rang true. "You fool! You played the great lord and scribbled your verses and wasted fortune after fortune. And do you know what fine judges really thought of those famous poems, those *Idle Hours* of yours? Oh, I have heard. They thought them frigid and foolish and artificial, and Monsieur de Voltaire himself corresponded with you only because he thought you were rich and powerful. And, though I share in your fall and your poverty and your disgrace, I am not sorry to see you brought so low."

Then Marguerite said a thing beautiful and amazing. "I think many of Gaston's poems were elegant and graceful, though I liked not the flatteries he addressed to the great. Had he ever loved me or I him, the verses would have made me happy."

"To be sure, Madame," Lisette almost shrieked. "Oh, to be sure! Money and elegance meant nothing to you nor the society of people of rank. You were used to none such. But when I was but five years old such were my grace and beauty and cleverness that I was chosen flower girl to be in attendance on Her Majesty, the Queen." She looked at me. "You did not know that, did you?"

I did not break my silence. It was Gaston de Saint-Florentin who spoke. "It is foolish and weak to harp upon the past and to spend your time bemoaning loss and change. Such is the council of all the philosophers, Monsieur de Vidal, and I know it to be true and sound, even though I do not wholly follow it. Mutability is the rule of life; the great have often been

cast down. 'Tis a turn of fortune's wheel. Doubtless it is harder for a woman bred amid elegance and waste to endure such disaster."

Once more it was he who left the chamber first. Lisette remained and tried to babble vainly and alluringly to me, but finding me silent and unresponsive, she at last flung petulantly out of the room and Marguerite and I heard her in a fury of restlessness go up and down the stairs, reach her chamber and descend again, seek out the weary serving-woman in the kitchen and regale her with a tale of wrong and former splendor and present misery, and then take up again that tramping up the stairs and down. We were so weary of her tramp and clamor that we went out of the house and closed its heavy oaken doors behind us, and sat upon the steps, hand in hand, in very truth like two young country people, and I got a glimpse of the great happiness that must be the portion of the simple, home-born dwellers upon the earth who could woo and wed and till their plot of ground and beget dear children and sink at last, painlessly, into an ancestral soil. It was more than a glimpse. It was a sharp, clear vision. And that vision helped me to sustain my grief and my inevitable loss. For it showed me that I could not be as one of those simple men, even if some miracle had given me the chance to be, even if my forever beloved had been at my side. To me the plain eternal processes would never have sufficed. Whether it was a blow to be struck for the liberation of my people or for that of all mankind, I could not live without seeking at least to strike it. I had to be upon some lasting and universal business that soared above the incidents of a particular fate. I needed traffic with eternity. I pressed

Marguerite to me; almost I said farewell to her in my heart.

From that hour on, Marguerite grew graver. The sparkle of her gaiety seemed quenched and her cheek blanched a little. Her spirit was so close to mine that she knew me to have undergone a change of mood and temper.

"If I were a foolish teasing woman, I would tax you with loving me less."

"I do not love you less; I shall never love you less."

"But you are more resigned to leaving me than you were before."

I tried to laugh. "Men speak of making virtues of their necessities. Bitter as it may be, perhaps that is the best that any man can do."

"'Tis a melancholy way of thinking. Can there be no clear happiness that is of our own choosing?"

"I hope that there is for others, though I have not seen it in my brief experience. There is not for me. Ah, Marguerite, when you think of me, think of me as one fated to be a pilgrim and a stranger and even an outcast, and yet as one who loves his fellow men and would do good to them."

She wept; she drew me to her; we held each other then, and during all those last days, with a passionate closeness. We wanted to interpenetrate each other. We clung as though we never could let go; yet in that very clinging there was the echo of farewell.

The summer was now at its zenith and the heat on that sun-beaten village was great. Dust flew and whirled in hot winds that blew from the South and the East. The very water of the pump was brackish, for all the nearer streams had almost dried up in their chalky beds.

This was Marguerite's first summer away from the temperate weather of the North. She drooped and was wan and without strength. Gaston de Saint-Florentin sat sullenly in his room, wiping his forehead and his wrists. But nothing seemed to diminish the energy or the clamorous rancour of Lisette. She stamped back and forth, and upstairs and down, her face covered with great shimmering globules of sweat, muttering or even screaming to herself or to any who could hear: "Out of sight is out of mind! The whores and pimps—that is what they are, all, all!—do not answer my letters! They flattered me and fawned on me when they thought they could get favors from me. Now there is not a sound." She burst in upon the weary Gaston and, leaving open the door of his chamber, shouted: "I want to send a special courier to Paris. Give me money? You have none? Thief! Fool! Pauper! The money was mine, mine, mine!"

The great heat and this woman's madness depressed us dreadfully. I sat by Marguerite where she reclined upon a couch, and held her hand lightly or read to her from a book of verses. Fits of terror shook me from time to time. Surely no man, I thought, had ever been in harder case than I. My beloved was sick and forlorn and beset by strange miseries, and I could not bring her succour, nor set her free, nor even tell her who I was; and the spear of that sorrow entered my heart deeper and deeper. There was one thing that I was set upon doing. But this thing would be of no avail to her unless she knew. And yet to impart this plan to her seemed coarse and ugly, and an affront to the delicacy of her soul. For while she lay there she spoke many words that were piercing in their beauty. "I am

beginning to know myself truly," she said. "I love not things by halves nor things shadowy nor things feeble and small. I never understood the language of worldly people: they try to be amused and yawn; they have friends and love nothing. I prefer the torment that consumes my life, to the pleasure that gluts theirs. So I may be less pleasing. But I know love. I have known what it is to love and to be loved, Jean, and that is better than to please."

I knelt beside her and kissed her hands; and the day after the next, a coolness seeming to come from the mountains, I saddled my horse and, on a trivial pretext, rode to Montélimar. I inquired after the town's notary of urchins on the dusty streets, and they directed me to a small old house, grinning at the name of Maître Clément Poussin. I knocked with the heavy brass knocker and found myself in the presence of a thin old man in brown breeches and a clean-enough shirt who, as I could see at once, had a great notion of the dignity and ceremoniousness of his calling and would seek to waste my time in pedantries.

I spoke to him sharply. "I shall pay you well for your services. But I desire that this matter come to no one's ear."

He screwed up his small grey face into a portentous wrinkled mask.

"Whatever the matter is, Monsieur, I shall treat it according to all the ancient and honorable rules and usages of my profession. Does it not say in the sixth title of the fourth Book of the Institutes of Law of Justinian, under the caption *De actionibus*—does it not say: "*Item actio de eo quod metus causa factum sit a caeteris*—"

"Spare me your learning, Maître Poussin," I said sharply. "I make no doubt of it. What I desire is clear: I hold here a mortgage upon the house at Dieu-le-fit herein specified and described, and upon the three farms equally specified and described herein, which are and have been the freehold of the Comte Gaston de Saint-Florentin. This mortgage was executed, as you see, by an advocate of Paris and bears the King's Advocate-General's seal."

With fluttering hands Poussin took the parchment.

"Aye, aye! A very properly written document, though parsimonious of supporting quotations from either the French or the Roman law. Yet valid—without doubt perfectly valid!" He looked up at me and suddenly began to chuckle with a soft writhing of his body. "So it has come to this with the Sieur de Saint-Florentin, for though that is undoubtedly his name and though he duly inherited these properties from his father, who was a good honest man, I have never seen patent nor licence by which he was denominated Comte or comes—"

Again I cut him short. "Remember what I said concerning any wagging of the tongue!"

"You may count upon and be sure of my *bona fides* in the affair."

"'Tis well. Now to the business I desire you to execute: I desire this mortgage to be assigned and given and deeded to Madame, the Comtesse de Saint-Florentin, born Marguerite Valois de la Branche, divesting myself of its possession and transferring it to her outright and in perpetuity, so that she can foreclose whenever she desires and possess herself of the properties. By the way, are they worth an hundred thousand

livres, which, as you see, is the amount of the claim against them?"

Again Poussin chuckled. "They are good properties enough. But I see that Monsieur is from Paris, despite what I seem to perceive as a Southern shading of his speech. There is no one here nor within a hundred leagues who has a hundred thousand livres and could buy in the house and lands. Whoever holds this mortgage is as good as possessed of the estate."

"I am glad. Then draw up the necessary papers. Use all your skill and knowledge. I'll give gratuities to the witnesses. Let them be people not too old and of good character, so that they neither die nor disappear. The Comtesse needs to be protected."

Again Poussin chuckled. When he did so, it was like the rattling of a parchment sere with age. "So 'tis said by the gossips to whom I pay no heed. Gaston has wasted fortunes on women. 'Tis but fair that his wife be reimbursed."

Poussin needed no clerk, being himself a good scrivener. He rubbed his hands and pursed his mouth and gathered his pens and inks and parchment sheets with many wheezy whistles and many suckings in of breath between his teeth. He studied Goulleau's document with critical and yet not disapproving grimaces. He made notations and, at last, with a great flourishing of intricate letters for the title of the deed, sat down to work. He had told me that it would be a matter of three to four hours before he could complete the document and that then witnesses would be at hand.

I sought me out an inn and gave my horse to the hostler to feed and to be rubbed; I demanded such simple food—bread and wine and cheese—as the innkeeper

had ready. He promised me a guinea-fowl with asparagus if I would wait. A fat, dark man, unused to travelers, he was voluble and inquisitive. Deep in my dark thoughts, I answered him briefly and at random. Weariness came over me, weariness of the world and of the strangeness of fate. Would it not have been better if I had remained in the Jews' street and lived even as my fathers had done and waited for the Messiah? Aye. 'Twould have been better had I been other than I was. For what happens to us is—ourselves. The innkeeper was still chattering as I rose to go: "Or perhaps Monsieur would buy a pound of the excellent nougat sweets, for which this place is known, to bring to a lady."

The weary hours came to an end. The transfer of the mortgage was complete and witnessed, a handsome-looking document, and Maître Poussin was well-fed and tempted to limp beside my horse in his pride and eagerness to know more than I had chosen to tell him.

I left his fading voice behind me and rode on into the dusk on the narrow road toward Dieu-le-fit. Half-way there, I met a horseman returning, a rare circumstance in that place and at that hour, and a terror at once strong and subtle crept into my very entrails and turned them chill. I gave my horse the spurs. "Marguerite"—her dear name was on my lips and in the very beating of my heart.

Yellow rays of candlelight cut the blue night from the chinks and slits of the wooden shutters in the house of Saint-Florentin. I leaped from my horse and in another moment was in the house and in the room where we partook of our meals. All the candles, twelve in number, in two heavy old candelabra on the table, had been lit. The room glowed. On the sofa against the wall half

reclined Marguerite, pale, still, her blue eyes all but closed. Her hands were clenched over her bosom. In a tall chair at her right sat Gaston de Saint-Florentin, his countenance frozen into grey immobility, his eyes bitter with resentment. Lisette stood at the table opposite those two, grasping a long letter in her short blunt hands which trembled violently, her face almost sleek with the sweat of her furious excitement. She lifted her head as I came in and burst into one of her peals of artificial laughter.

"'Tis well that you have come to hear. You! It would appear from my informant that Olivier always knew from the coachman Grégoire who and what you were, son of the very usurer to whom our fine lady there sold her jewels which Gaston bought with money he owed me! Choiseul had in his pay, it likewise appears, several spies of your kidney—Christ-killers spawned in some foul alley." Again she laughed. "Jew, Jew, Jew!" She spat first on the floor and then upon my coat. She turned her now scarlet fury upon Marguerite. "I trust, Madame, that you enjoyed his embraces and his Jewish stench. 'Tis well-known that this stench exceeds all other stenches. All!" Again her laughter pealed.

Marguerite opened her eyes and looked at me with wonder and with dismay, yet without anger or hate. I put my hand upon my heart. Almost, although I dared not trust the meaning, those eyes seemed to say: "You might have told me."

Hoarsely words came from Saint-Florentin: "What have you to say, Monsieur?"

I raised my head, as I remember, though I had not meant to do so.

"I am a Jew." A dark mysterious pride and splendor

flooded me. I fixed my eyes upon Marguerite's face. "That is what Moses said before the face of Pharaoh. Do you remember? Do you? But I shall go. Only here is a parchment duly drawn up by a notary by which I transfer to Madame, your wife, Monsieur de Saint-Florentin, the mortgage that I hold upon your house and lands. Thus, you will be pleased to observe, the Jew who asked no interest is an hundred thousand livres poorer than he was. I make this transfer to Madame de Saint-Florentin in the hope that she will use it as a defense against the insults and slights that are heaped upon her in this house."

I moved forward and laid the document gently into Marguerite's lap. Her hands quivered, as did her lips. But she kept her eyes veiled. Saint-Florentin followed me silently with his glance. Lisette threw up her hands in a grotesque mockery of wonder, and laughed shrilly, penetratingly, half madly. The peals, cold and it seemed uncontrollable, followed me as I left the room and house, and found my horse in the dark and moonless night.

Chapter Eight

WHAT now? What now? Never did man set out on a harder journey than I when I set out on that last one from Dieu-le-fit to Paris. 'Tis well to travel with hope at heart; but I seemed upon this journey to be abandoned by all hope, by hope for my people, by hope for the very life of my heart. I had to lie at inns and my dreams were so evil that I grew fearful of sleep itself. I saw Marguerite's face in the guise of an ivory mask with agate eyes turned stonily upon me. She was not even angry. She was a creature stony and congealed. Above her head, in these dreams, quivered, like forked lightning, the peals of Lisette's half-maniacal laughter, while in a dim background the huge flabby bulk of Saint-Florentin shook with evil satisfaction.

Rains set in; I struggled through a dim world, a world as of the damned. At last in Dijon I was enabled to take a stagecoach. Yet now, myself inactive, I was only the more tormented by my grief and almost, in my weariness, gave way to tears. One desire remained, one only: to reach the sober house of my father and grandfather in the *Juiverie* and hide me in its cool concealing dusk. Yet will youth not endure to be wholly

bereft of hope. Was it a fantasy that I hid deep within me a gleam of expectancy that my grandfather—none other than he, the saint and sage—would find a word of wisdom for me in my need? I chid myself for the folly, yet was that gleam not extinguished. With it burning precariously yet stubbornly within me, I at last stood before him.

His great eyes brightened and then were lowered half-quenched.

"Tell your tale, my son. Many have told me theirs—tales sinful and curious and tragic, tales concerning Israel and themselves, tales concerning the world's peoples and themselves. All things have been before; all sins have been sinned, all hopes entertained, all—all."

He seemed to withdraw into memories. Nevertheless, I spoke. I dared to tell him the tale of Marguerite and myself.

He opened his eyes which could recover from time to time all the flame of youth.

"But the woman's husband lives."

"That is not the source of my agony."

He frowned. "Wait not for a man's death—no man's. God desires not the destruction of the sinner but of the sin."

I was too avid of any shred of hope to take to heart his warning. "But if it were to be some day that she were free! Is her soul dark with hate and loathing? How deep into the heart of men goes that hatred of us?"

My grandfather, the Rabbi Moshe ben Yitzchak Ventura, smiled a small and sharply subtle smile.

"The hatred is strangely eternal. Yet in the soul of a man or of a woman, of this man or of that woman,

it is shallow and an artifice and fades at a touch—a touch of knowledge, a touch of love, of kindness, of suffering. And, in truth, there have always been souls that have sought us. With your own eyes you saw, according to your tale, the inscription in the chalkstone of the cave near the village of Dieu-le-fît: ‘*Je suis Abraham le fou?*’”

“We saw it together and I wondered at it.”

“It was written there by poor Jehan de Meung, may he rest in peace, who sought to come to us and be at one with us. But it was in the high days of the Inquisition, nearly two centuries ago. So they took him and broke him in prison—broke him, body and soul, and then let him wander forth, a poor stricken madman, as the scribbled words say. ’Twas a brave yet grievous matter and is recorded in the memory book of the Holy Congregation of Avignon.”

“It was long ago and, as you say, Grandfather, in an iron age. Truly, I am no longer as certain that this is a greatly better time, as I was but a brief year ago. I had a dream and darkness came over it. Yet are not other forces at least awake today? And tell me this, above all, has it happened that a great and generous heart has turned to us, whether for the sake of love or of compassion or of justice or of all of these?”

He raised his hands as in benediction. He was suddenly no more old and half-quenched. “’Tis rare and strange and well-nigh unheard of. But he who comes to love Israel, loves with a love that does not die. Once I have seen it—once.”

I bowed my head to listen. Here is the tale my grandfather related:

Nearly thirty years ago [my grandfather said], I

being then a man still young, there came to me two cloaked and hooded strangers in the dead of night. The taller one said his name was Valenti Potocki; he pointed to his companion, a thick-set broad fellow with strangely large soft hands and called him Zaremba. He said they were both of the Polish nation and had both vowed a vow, each to himself and God, each also to the other, that they would become Jews. The man who called himself Valenti Potocki threw off his shadowy hood and stepped into the bright light of the candles on my table. His face was long and thin and slightly bearded; his eyes were dark and large, and they were the most sorrowful eyes I had ever seen. They sorrowed not for this thing or for that; they sorrowed for the world. I was astonished; I trembled a little. The days were evil. The small community here in Paris lived half in hiding. I asked Potocki why he had not gone to some greater and stronger community. He answered that he and Zaremba did, indeed, plan to go to Amsterdam and live there openly as Jews, but that they desired first to be circumcised and admitted to the community of Israel.

I declared to him [my grandfather continued] that the thing he desired was not simple; that he spoke, despite the plain words he used, like one accustomed to command; that this was a thing that could not be commanded: it depended on testing and training and a change of the will and of the whole man, seeing that the yoke of the law was a crushing burden to one who loved it not, and that for a Christian to become a Jew was certain danger and possibly martyrdom both for the man who changed his faith and for those who would be considered his accomplices. He looked at me long with those sorrowful eyes. He asked me if I were

afraid. I told him that all fear would leave me except the fear of the Eternal and that all things would be put behind me except the Sanctification of the Name even unto death, if I could be utterly sure that this thing he desired was not only the prompting of his soul's deepest need but was also being done according to knowledge and with the assurance that he would not shrink from the consequences and then cry out upon the Jews who had lured and tricked him. For I was, as he must know, responsible not only for myself but for my brethren and for their security. Upon hearing this he said that he would tell me what was in his heart, and he and the man Zaremba sat down with me at my table.

Potocki said that he had always been afraid of cruelty and of violence and had hated both with a fierce desperation of his whole soul. His father had been a huge giant of a man who was determined that his son should be his equal some day; a great hunter and mighty trenchermen and drinker after the hunt, a wild magnificent rider, a loud, laughing swinger of the lordly lash over serf and Jew. He had torn the child Valenti from the arms of his gentle mother and tied him to a horse and made him a witness of that prowess of his which enabled him to leap from his own mount on to the back of a wild boar and stab the beast to death. Then, with wild hallooing, the hunt raced back through the dark Polish forest to the manorial hall of the Potockis and the child Valenti was forced to sit beside his father. When the latter was deep in drink Jews were dragged in and bidden to dance. Their ear-locks flew and their long coats billowed behind them and their fur-trimmed hats shifted to grotesque positions on their heads. But

their eyes, though full of pain, were undaunted eyes and despised the lewd and drunken *Pan*.

The mother died soon after in another childbirth and the boy Valenti's grief was boundless. And equally boundless grew to be his hatred of his father who now filled the hall with wild boon companions by day and with unwilling, shrieking but finally drunken and complaisant peasant wenches by night. At twelve Valenti, taught only now and then by a village priest who could barely read his breviary and who was himself an avid killer of small game, came to the conclusion that lust and cruelty were like a single red haze, a blood-colored haze, which drenched the house of his father and the cottage of the priest and the hunting preserves of the forests. The boy needed to get out of this red haze; it became a torture to him. He ran, feeling that the evil one was behind him, to the village where the Jews lived. He entered the house of a Jew. The Jew and his wife received the young *Pan* courteously; seeing the horror in the boy's eyes, they showed him tenderness. Valenti almost swooned in the relief of whiteness. There was no red haze in this house, neither the red haze of lust which desecrated the memory of his mother nor the deeper haze of blood. He had got to the point where he could eat but little at home. He was nauseated by the overhung venison and the great pasties of game and the pewter tankards of ale and Hungarian wine. The Jew's wife gave him food without blood or sharp tang. The Jew, seeing the great sorrow and suffering in the young *Pan*'s eyes, wished him peace—*sholem*. The boy learned the word and felt the thing itself in the Jew's house and repeated it over and over to himself like a talisman that would help him to keep

away the goblins of lust and blood that danced in the red haze. "*Shalom*," he said to himself, "*shalom*." And he wept as he had not done since his mother died.

Day after day, Valenti went to the house of Reb Yankele, Master Jacob, for that was the Jew's name. He sat at table with Jacob and his wife and his two sons on weekdays and also on the eve of the Sabbath. Though Jacob knew Polish enough to transact his business which was that of buying wood from the peasants and sending it down the Vistula River to the German merchants in the city of Danzig, his wife and sons knew but little. Gradually, Valenti learned a good deal of the language of the Jews, and the sons of Jacob learned not a little Polish from him, and now he began to ask questions: Why was the world so full of cruelty? Why did nearly all men—nay, *all* the men he knew—delight in hurting and killing and inflicting humiliation and pain upon their fellow creatures? Reb Yankele was a plain man—"a man of earth," he called himself, and could only answer that the law of God and of Moses had commanded men to love each other and be merciful to each other, and that all the Jewish sages had said that this commandment was the most important of all commandments—even going so far as to say that putting your fellow man to shame was not far short of the sin of taking life. Valenti asked the priest whether these precepts of the Jewish religion were not also those of the Catholic Church and why, if this were so, Christians did not obey the law of God even as the Jews did, who were men of peace, who would neither kill nor hurt, who did not even, as he knew from his friend Master Jacob, hate those who oppressed and humiliated them, but prayed God to

send a Messiah who would redeem Israel from bondage and all men unto goodness and unto peace.

Valenti Potocki was in his fifteenth year [my grandfather said] when this thing happened. The priest listened to him with a strange frown and a greenish malicious eye. He gave the lad no answer. He ran to the *Pan*; he sent a messenger to the bishop at Poznian. A tall, dark man, a priest of the Jesuit order, came riding from Poznian and he and the *Pan* and the village priest were closeted together. Then the *Pan* came forth from the chamber in which he had sat with the priests and took Valenti by the arm and dragged him, without a word, to a room far up in a turret of the manor house, and thrust him in and locked the door. They kept him a prisoner there for many days. Once only the priest came to see him and told him grimly that he was the luckiest of fools and blasphemers, seeing that neither the bishop nor the voyvod, the overlord, desired a scandal of so grievous a kind among the *panovie*, the gentry, of his province. So at last he was released. His father feigned not to see him. The maids and grooms crossed themselves at the sight of him. He ran out into the green fields and through a patch of forest to the village and to the house of Reb Yankele. The door was broken; everything in the house was in tatters and splinters. There was no living soul within.

He ran from Jew's house to Jew's house, for he had known many of the Jews of the village, to see and greet them. He knocked at door after door. And each door was opened and when he who opened it saw who was there, the opener of the door grew white, white as milk, white as untrodden snow in the depth of the forest, and began to weep and then, with a gesture so

sorrowful that the sunshine faded and the earth turned to cinders, silently closed the door in Valenti's face. This thing happened once and twice and thrice and yet again. Then in a very frenzy of misery and grief the young Potocki ran to the house of the rabbi of that village, a tall beautiful man whose name was Yeheskiel, and it happened that the rabbi was going forth from his house and Potocki clung to the rabbi's *caftan* and besought him: "O good Yeheskiel, good Rabbi, tell me what I must know!" The Rabbi Yeheskiel stood very still. Then from his eyes too the tears began to flow slowly, slowly, the hard large tears and fell upon his beard and fell on his *caftan*. He raised his hands: "They killed them, Valenti Potocki; they killed Jacob and his wife and his two sons. They killed them not quickly and mercifully; they killed them slowly, very slowly, oh, so slowly and so dreadfully. Yet are they now in *Gan Eden* and it behooves us to have compassion, we being the compassionate children of the compassionate, upon their tormentors who knew not what they did."

Having spoken so far with the strange eyes of his companion Zaremba upon him [my grandfather continued], Potocki fell silent and wrung his hands which were slender and shapely and white. He lowered his head and half closed his lids. "Somewhere in the darkest forest of all the world there is a deep pool into which flow and are gathered all the tears of pity wept for all the innocent who are made to suffer in all the four corners of earth. In the dreams of night, whenever I sleep for a brief period, I stand beside that pool. It rises a little, it brims a little more night by night. A night will come when it will overflow its rim and

become a raging torrent. It will leap up like a boiling fountain; it will roar like a thousand claps of thunder; it will overwhelm with its scalding floods a world in which such things can be."

Thereafter, Potocki spoke more calmly. It was evident enough that since that moment with the Rabbi Yeheskiel he needed to range himself in this world and in the next with those who were the compassionate children of the compassionate and not with those who hunted and tortured and slew. But young as he was that dreadful hour taught him prudence. He went no more to the village where the Jews lived. He lived a lonely life in the manor house. His father and the priest treated him with contempt and loathing; his father's boon companions broke into bellowing laughter when they saw him. The priest prodded his father to make a will disinheriting his unnatural son. But the *Pan* Potocki was superstitious and was afraid that he would die if he made a will. The bishop took a hand in the matter. But the only result was that the *Pan* drank harder and harder and rode more and more wildly in his drunken frenzies and so one day was gored to death by a wild boar and brought home by his huntsmen, blood-drenched and still.

With the help of Zaremba, a peasant of the region, Valenti Potocki put in order the confused estate. Who was Zaremba? He was the grandson of a Jewess who had been violated and gotten with child by one of the Cossacks of the raging *Chmielnicki*, the unspeakable *hetman* of the Ukrainian plains. Zaremba's mother, the child of that blasphemous embrace, had filled his childhood and his youth with whispers—whispers of blessings and of prayers and of legends. Zaremba had been

servant of a Jewish innkeeper who took him to be a goy like any other; Zaremba had been treated humanly by his Jewish master and nursed in illness by the man's wife, and in that house had heard whispered reports of the thing that had happened fifteen versts away to the young Pan Valenti Potocki and also what had happened to Reb Yankel and to his wife and his sons. Hearing this, Zaremba had made his way to the estate and the villages of the Potockis and had offered his services to the young Pan.

He became Valenti's steward; he was the only man who could be trusted to carry out the orders which burned in Potocki's heart: the easing of the lot of the serfs on the estate, the reduction of the rentals payable by Jewish lessors of inns and forest preserves and distilleries, the spreading of *shalom*—of peace—between peasant and Jew. But these measures and their results came to the ears of the local gentry, and the panowie of the neighboring estates banded together in secret council against the blasphemous innovations—certain to lead to revolt and destruction, if not indeed to the very uprooting of the Catholic religion and the return of men to heathen nakedness—of the accursed Judaising Pan Valenti Potocki, traitor to his class and nation and Church. The thing was reported to the voyvod of the province; once more the Bishop of Poznian, now old and crueller than ever, was drawn in. The barns on Valenti's estate went up suddenly in fierce flames by night; the Jews in his village were kidnapped and brought back without ears and with inch-deep welts on their backs; the priests cried out that Valenti Potocki had been to no mass since his childhood. Satan, they said, was abroad in the land and blasphemy was killing

the fertility of Polish earth; soon the harvests would wither on the stalks and the fruits be stricken with gangrene before they ripened, and the day would surely come when the Eucharist, affronted by heretic and rebel and Jew, would ooze living blood.

Yet would Valenti have held out, had not his own peasants implored himself and Zaremba to desist from these new ways and had not these very peasants whose lot he had immeasurably eased, arisen and burned Jewish inns and the trees upon forests leased by Jews, and thronged to mass to hear the imprecations of the priest. Again, as in the days of his childhood and adolescence, that red haze seemed to steam up from the very earth for Valenti Potocki and he needed to flee to a place of whiteness and peace—to flee for his very life and for his very reason.

Such was the story told between midnight and dawn by the Pan Valenti Potocki nearly thirty years ago. He was determined to become a Jew and to sanctify the Name with his life and, if need be, with his death. Therefore I, Moshe ben Yitzchak Ventura [continued my grandfather], desiring to abbreviate neither his nor my share in the world to come, set about to make all proper and necessary preparations for the circumcision and reception into the eternal community of Israel of these two reborn souls. It grieved Potocki that his friend and servant Zaremba, upon various pretexts, deferred his own conversion until they should meet, as they had planned to do, in Amsterdam. But the Pan himself could not bear the thought of delay. His conscience was wounded and needed healing. He needed to be where he belonged, among the persecuted, the defenseless, the innocent, the wronged.

He celebrated a single sabbath with us, singing the *Lecho Dodi* in a clear high glad voice, a voice that came with a great sweet strangeness out of that melancholy countenance. At that single sabbath's end he left us on his way to Amsterdam. I never saw him more.

But the tale came to me. Wayfarers told it on sabbath eves, men from the West and later men from the East, men of different tempers who told it in different ways according to their tempers: some told it as the tale of a good-hearted fool who had done Israel more harm than good; others, and these were the majority, as the tale of a true *ger zedek*, a wholly righteous proselyte, who had sanctified the Name and helped to redeem the world by his example.

For the culmination of the tale was this: that his soul would not suffer Potocki to remain in Amsterdam where he could have lived as a Jew and died as a Jew in peace. He was impelled to go back to Poland and to wander through the towns and villages and live as a pious Jew among Jews and to speak comforting words to them and to humble himself before them in expiation of what the men of his nation had now for so long done to them. He helped the poor; he eased the afflicted; he fasted on days when there was no need, and bathed not otherwise than in ice-cold waters, and joined the comradeship of the Psalm-sayers and singers, and visited the sick and washed the dead. But he also went out among the peasants, the poor serfs, and sought to reconcile them to their Jewish brethren. By one of these serfs, a poor raw lout who afterward wept and imposed penances on himself, he was denounced.

The news flared up. The priests were in a state of fury. Emissaries of the Holy Office of the Inquisition set up a

court in Vilna, and Valenti Potocki was tried and fiercely tortured. But his heart had always known that such would be his end and that this was perhaps the right and fitting end for him in such a world as his fellows had made. He did not argue; neither did he defend himself. He declared the Unity and assured his tormentors that no prolongation of clamour or agony would avail. They burned him at the stake in Vilna in front of a cathedral of the heretical Greek Church of the Russians, unmindful of the irony of that act in that place. Contemptuously, they let the Jews carry away the poor charred body. They had finished what had been begun so long ago. Tenderly, the Jews laid the *ger zedek* to rest in their *Keber Abot*, the resting place of their fathers, and in the years that have sped since that day, two tales have come from Vilna. One is this: that more and more Jews from towns and remote villages in both Poland and Lithuania have come on holy days to pray and praise the Eternal upon the grave of Valenti Potocki; and the other is that a sapling planted on that grave on the day when the earth was mounded over it has grown into a mighty tree and that from the trunk of that tree have grown two, and only two, great branches, one pointing to the East and one pointing to the West, as though this tree were to be forevermore a similitude of that Cross—not of us be it said—on which from age to age Israel is crucified for the sins of its oppressors. . . .

Here ended my grandfather's tale.

I was as moved by the hearing as he was by the telling. It had almost made me forget my own loss and

sorrow and unconquerable hope. But now I cried, seeing that his very heart was speaking to mine: "What of Marguerite and me? What of us?"

He closed his eyes. He spoke as from deep within: "You must be guilty of no act. Hardly of a thought. She is bound by the fetters of the world. 'Tis not for you to say: she owes no debt to that life to which she consented. If she were free, I would trust to the *Ruah ha-Kodesh*, the holy breathing of the Eternal. It must breathe upon her. If it does, all that seems darkness about us to all the world, will seem light to her; our poverty will seem wealth to her and our oppression freedom. But no mortal act can bring this thing about. Only hope and patience and prayer."

Chapter Nine

I CLUNG to my grandfather's words. I tried to cling to them. Yet often was I engulfed in waves of agony. I would see Marguerite hating our days and nights, feeling all the beauty between us to be tarnished. And then again there came to me memories of this hour and that, of this act and that, and my heart said to me: She cannot but remember these in love. By day and by night, the pangs of memory or of hope stabbed me; without warning the stabs came and I would feel myself suddenly grow white and no more able to give attention to the small, hot, futile words that men uttered in my hearing.

The community sent me to see the Abbé Guené, that friend of Israel's freedom once more. He was bright with a birdlike brightness over his snuff-stained *soutane*. He was sure that all would be well—or, at least, better—within a few short years. He was writing a book to prove that we were the brethren of the prophets and that the Rights of Man, being on the march, must and should reach us. And that was well and noble and most kindly meant. But he added that we should seek to be less separatist and morose and no more withdraw from the

general enlightenment of the age, and should give up money-lending (as though this had not been forced upon us by an hundred interdictions of all other pursuits), and should no longer refuse to eat and drink with our Christian neighbours. I, being but a Jew and so a suppliant, did not ask him why we should give up our Law as a price of rights which, according to him, were ours inherently. But I was little satisfied with what he said and determined from now on to be depressed by no temporary failure, nor elated by any small forward step, but to watch this world soberly and listen for other voices.

I took my father's advice to go to Strasbourg. I would be in reality no farther from Marguerite there than in Paris. What divided us was not leagues in space. And perhaps, I thought, remembering that sabbath evening now so long ago, and the bright, sharp words of Cerfberr, that another light might be rising and another spirit being born in the lands of the North.

Cerfberr received me with great kindness in his house. He considered it an excellent thing that I, one of the Sephardim, the Jews of Spanish origin, should join the Jews who, dwelling in the North and East of Europe, were known as Ashkenazim, or Germans, seeing that they spoke either German or some dialect of that language. He advised me to learn it, even though he and all his family spoke French as well. He reminded me of the sabbath eve in Paris when he had told me of the sage Moses Mendelssohn in Berlin. He himself, though he had been for many years now purveyor to the King's armies, still lived in Strasbourg merely on sufferance, nor had he been able to procure even this precarious privilege for any other Jewish family. Kinsmen or clerks he

could bring into the city, but only on the plea that they were needed in the carrying on of his affairs for the King. In consequence, they had all to be housed under his roof.

He regarded it as a triumph that he had been permitted to buy ground and build a house; with a wry smile he explained that the street on which his house stood was already being called the Judengasse, or Rue des Juifs. No Jews but himself and his kinsmen and clerks lived there. Yet the people already dubbed it Jews' street. He walked with me on the morning after my arrival in the fine cool autumn air. I saw that it was a handsome clean street with rows of tall burghers' houses on either side. From a curve opposite the house of Cerfberr could be seen, soaring above the gabled black roofs and orange chimney-pots, the single great spire of the famous cathedral. The sun was on it and brought out the ruddy glint and glow of the reddish sandstone of which it is built. Patches of blue sky burned through the clefts and crevices of the lacy belfry.

From it our eyes turned to the house opposite, the house which Herz Cerfberr had built. It had four broad stories, each with four great tall beautiful windows to the street, except on the first floor where an arched and carven doorway occupied the space of two windows. It was the first house I had ever seen that a Jew had caused to be built for himself and his family, and it gave me a feeling of dignity and comfort which yet could not be a tranquil feeling, seeing that Cerfberr himself, despite his wealth and honorable services to the King, could have been expelled and sent back to his native village of Medelsheim without formality. I told him my thoughts. Now his bearded smile was subtle and not, I thought,

without a trace of self-satisfaction. He replied that this seemed, indeed, to be so, but that the authorities could, in fact, hardly afford to do so, because his services had been such as none other had succeeded in performing. The fact was known not only here but at Court. Hence he had, despite an order and a tradition of many centuries, caused an additional large room to be built out into the garden which he purposed to turn into a synagogue. Often Jewish pedlars and alms-gatherers depended on his hospitality on sabbaths and holidays. Then with the members of his own household there was often a *minyan*, or minimum of ten men, and services could be conducted. He rubbed his hands with quiet glee and, though I shared his pleasure, 'twas not without a small sore feeling at the fact that the better had to be got of someone before we could pray to our God or praise Him after our own fashion.

We went into the house to break our fast and I now met the members of his household with whom I was to live. Cerfberr's wife, Rachel, was a quiet woman still handsome and very erect, in a grey silk frock with fine lace and a gold medallion at her throat. His two sons, Max and Baruch—the elder and taller having assumed the name of Max instead of Moshe—wore fashionable suits and tied their own long hair with broad ribbons as, they assured me, was now the mode among the students at the University of Strasbourg. I seemed to note a sullenness in the dark well-molded features of both. They spoke French and German interchangeably, received packets of books from both Berlin and Paris but held those from the Prussian capital to be vastly more delightful. Max drew from his pocket a thin elegantly printed volume which he had just received, entitled A

Letter of Herr Moses Mendelssohn of Berlin to the Herr Diaconus Lavater in Zürich. He opened the little book and translated for my benefit into French: "I have the happiness of possessing as my friend many an excellent man who is not of my faith. Our mutual affection is sincere, although we suspect and, in truth, assume that in matters of faith our opinions are very divergent. I enjoy the association with such and am improved and delighted thereby. Never has my secret heart exclaimed over any: "Alas for that fair soul!" Yet he who believes that there is no salvation out of his faith, how many such sighs must rise from his breast! "

While he was speaking these words or, rather, reading them, the sullenness had faded from the features of Max Cerfberr. "This," he now exclaimed, "this points the path to the future!"

He drew himself up, as did his brother. Rachel Cerfberr regarded her sons with pride. The eyes of Cerfberr himself were without expression. I glanced at David Sinzheim, Rachel's brother, and at Rivke, his wife. Both of them, small, dark, plump, continued eating with the air of people who would not let trivial matters interrupt their serious pursuits. From a full mouth Sinzheim muttered to his wife: "The Flemish weavers are coming to-day."

Only Chava, daughter and youngest child of Cerfberr, a maiden of glossy hair and singularly beautiful countenance, opened wide her glowing eyes, bronze-colored as the leaves of autumn in the vineyards, and said: "Had his Christian friends agreed with Herr Mendelssohn, he would never have needed to write this letter. But Herr Diaconus Lavater sent him a book concerning the truth of the Christian religion and bade the worthy

Mendelssohn either to refute its argument or, failing in that, to draw the necessary consequences, namely, to abandon the faith of his fathers and become a Christian."

Cerfberr laughed. "A wise one, my little daughter! So you read the book?"

Chava blushed and laughed. Max and Baruch looked sullen once again, with their air of hurt and sultry gloom.

It was Baruch who spoke now and his voice cracked a little: "Rome was not built in a day. Is it not something, is it not a great deal that the best minds in Berlin do love and esteem Moses Mendelssohn? I have been in Berlin; I have seen him sitting in a coffee-house with the great wits of that city. The Prussian Academy of Sciences gave him a prize. He is small and a hunchback and unbeautiful. His moral and intellectual qualities have prevailed; what is true of him may one day become true of us all."

Cerfberr wagged his head and looked at his sons with admiration. But the admiration, I thought, was merely that of a father delighting in the play of intelligent children. Therefore, I asked him somewhat bluntly what he thought of these matters. He wagged his head once more.

"'Twas with difficulty that our good Moshe of Dessau obtained the right to live in Berlin. He was a poor *melamed*; he taught little children. Next he became a book-keeper. And now he began to write philosophical discourses in the most beautiful and correct German. Everybody was pleased and astonished. Aha, said they, a Jew can be a civilized man and a good man and a philosopher! Was that any news to us? 'Tis a nine days' wonder to *them*. When the nine days are gone we shall see what remains."

Max Cerfberr's face was pink. "You always see things black, Father. Naturally, we shall have to do our share. In Berlin the sons and daughters of a few Jewish families are already indistinguishable from their Christian neighbors and are treated courteously in public and in private."

Chava laughed. "If they are well-treated because they are not known to be Jews what has that to do with the treatment of Jews?"

Max and Baruch spoke confusedly and angrily at the same time. They chid the young sister for not grasping their meaning, which was not that Jews should pretend not to be what they were but should cease to give offense by singularity of costume or conduct.

I could not help observing that the matter discussed was not new. The elders of the community in Avignon and Carpentras had issued regulations many years ago that, though men were forbidden to wear wigs with curls within the community, they might wear these or any other gentile finery when journeying, so as not to be annoyed.

Cerfberr laughed.

"'Twas the same in Metz. In my great-grandfather's time Jewish women were forbidden by the community to have their veils and dresses embroidered with gold by non-Jews lest envy lead to pillage. This shows that even in the last century they tried to share the world's fashions when they had the necessary *Reichstaler*."

"Those were other lands and other days," Baruch said tersely. "We are living in an enlightened age. We are not trying to avoid attack or robbery; we are seeking to be human beings like other human beings in a free world. And I wonder, Monsieur Vidal, that you, being

young and straight from Paris, are not in agreement with us."

From this remark I inferred that Cerfberr did not give his sons his entire confidence. They knew not the part I had played in the matter of the petition of the Corporations of merchants and tradesmen.

"There was a time when I shared your hopes. Perhaps I share them still. But experience has shown me that the opinions of philosophers do but little affect life. There are men in Paris, like the Abbé Guené, who burn with indignation at our humiliations and sufferings. Doubtless there will ever be such. To what true good this will lead, I know not."

Rachel, the wife of Cerfberr, had been silent hitherto. She leaned toward me now. "Have you enough to eat? Always these discussions! Always the same. We live better now than in olden times. Let us be content and thank God. Did you sleep well under our roof?"

"Very well," I answered, "except that twice the blowing of a horn awakened me. It was a blast, almost a roar."

A silence fell upon the company. No one moved. There was no rustle of a garment nor faint click of China. I looked from face to face. Gloom was on all, except for the wry smile of Cerfberr himself. Chava looked at her brothers with a touch of pity in her luminous eyes.

It was she who spoke. "Is it not better to enlighten our guest?"

Her father nodded.

"I shall tell you the tale," Chava said with her eyes on me, "as the common people tell it in their Alsatian German, as a serving girl in all innocence, forgetting for the moment who we are, told it to me when I was

a little child. She said: One summer over four hundred years ago, they say, there came to Alsace the most terrible pestilence that had ever afflicted the lands of the Rhine. Out of Asia and Africa came this plague and slew thousands upon thousands in both Christendom and heathendom. The peoples torn by fright and horror called this pestilence the Black Death. In Strasbourg, too, the pestilence raged. As many as sixteen thousand souls went to their graves and ineffable were the lamentation and the woe of men. Only the Jews were spared by the Black Death, in Strasbourg as in other places. And so all along the towns and cities of the Rhine arose first the whisper and then the cry that the Jews had thrown poison into all wells of water and had caused this dreadful dying of men. And in many cities, even from the sea of the North unto our German lands here, the enraged peoples burned the Jews. In Strasbourg, moreover, the Jews had another and equally accursed plan, which was to use the unspeakable misery and grief in order to betray the city and hand it over to the enemy. But the plan could not be hidden and the populace, tortured to the marrow by the Black Death threw itself upon the Jews. On Saturday, which was Saint-Valentine's Day, the Jews were burned, men and women and children, two thousand and more in number on a great scaffold in their own graveyard. And, seeing that they had planned to summon the enemy by the blowing of a horn, so the rulers and aldermen of the city ordered that henceforth and for all times to come twice on every night a great blast of a horn should be blown from the spire of the cathedral to the shame and confusion of the Jews."

Chava's voice broke on a sob. Max Cerfberr sprang up from his seat.

"Those were times of ignorance and —"

His father cut him short. "True. Also the Duc de Broglie graciously pats my shoulder because the cloth I furnish the King's troops is honest cloth. But before I indulge in foolish hope let *them* cease blowing the blast at night and let *them* cease telling the tale." He looked around the table to see that all had finished their repast. "Rabothai n'barech—Gentlemen, let us say grace."

Chapter Ten

I MUST not say that the three years in Strasbourg were not good years. Yet the piercing lustrous eyes of Chava discovered my inmost state. For I scanned the fugitive gazettes from Paris for a name she did not know; I was feverish when a missive from my father was too long delayed; I was held back as by an iron hand, despite my youth, from any tenderness toward any woman. And so Chava's deep instinct knew that I was bound and my heart forever in another's keeping, not by any act of my will but because fate had so decreed.

I had placed what remained of my mother's fortune into the enterprises of Cerfberr, and these throve more and more. He continued not only to purvey cloth and later ready-made uniforms to the King's armies; he became the correspondent and associate of an extraordinary young man of Frankfurt-am-Main named Mayer Amschel Rothschild who, though but in the third decade in his life, was becoming a power as a banker and was financing the Grand Duke William of Hessen. Once, indeed, Cerfberr journeyed to Frankfurt. When he came back he was grave but also joyous. He said that he foresaw things good and noteworthy. Jews, by virtue of their

correspondence with brethren in all lands, as well as by virtue of the sobriety of their lives, were well able to serve the societies of men as bankers. They had been forced to deal in money and precious movable goods for so long that they understood the nature of these; there was no danger that any Jew would default on monies entrusted to him by reason of gambling or wenching or drunkenness.

He communicated these facts and the hopes he nourished to me before he did to his sons. He gave me more and more of his esteem and affection, and I returned his sentiments. I was sorrowful in that I could not wholly share his joyful expectancy for the future of our people. He taxed me with this fact. I answered that I understood all that he said very well and was in agreement with it; that, doubtless, the lot of our people would become easier if the developing societies of men found us useful in the performance of certain offices; but, I could not help arguing, suppose these societies underwent other changes, or suppose that members of them learned to perform for themselves the offices which were now, as it were, falling into our hands. What, then, would be our estate? His spirits were dashed by my words. He asked me what I desired. I said that I hardly knew. But that I was frightened for all I could do to the contrary of any mitigation of our bitter lot through any special services we might perform, seeing how easily these could be taken away from us, or through any imitation of gentile ways and customs, such as his sons were practicing, seeing that such imitations were tributes in the very nature of which there was the admission of inferiority and slavishness. Cerfberr laughed a very bitter laugh. He asked me whether I expected Christendom suddenly,

from one day to the next, so to speak, to admit the injustice done us and declare our innocence and reverse the sentiment of the centuries and hand us all human rights on a silver platter. I cried out with some passion that I expected nothing, that I expected less, perhaps, than he, but that I did not believe we could be lastingly freed from our servitude and our suffering by any device or any contrivance but only by a change of heart and an act of contrition on the part of the Christian world.

"For, look," I said, "if they still hate us, that hatred will be but held in abeyance while our use to them lasts and, once our use is over, will flare up but the more fiercely for having been held in check: and if they endure us only because we seem to be less unlike them, how shall we feel continuously to be living only on sufferance and how in the end shall we dread to speak one natural Jewish word or perform one natural Jewish gesture for fear that our likeness to them be diminished and their endurance of us be put to too sharp a test!"

Cerfberr listened to me with great attention. I saw that he understood me well, but that he was unwilling to entertain such melancholy thoughts.

"What a wild enthusiast you are," he said drily. "Oh, there is much truth in what you say. I would not have you think me a complete *hamor* (ass)." The use of the Hebrew word eased him. He smiled. "But do you expect us to desist from any honorable means of gaining some human and perchance one day, some civic rights because our means of gaining them hide the possibility of danger in a future that neither we nor our children nor, perhaps, our children's children are like to see?"

"God forbid," I said quietly. Then suddenly I re-

remembered that first day I had spent in his house and remembered his words concerning the blowing of the horn to our shame and confusion. I recalled his words to him: "Let *them* cease blowing the blast and telling the tale!"

"And is that not all I, too, ask?" He was irritated. "I told you I understood you. We all have moments in which nothing less than the coming of the Messiah will content us! But we must live in a daylight world. That reminds me: I have had some correspondence with your father. Why do you not marry Chava? I think I could get you the privilege of building a house of your own."

I felt the pallor creeping over my face.

"Dear friend and *haber* and benefactor, too, I cannot. Chava is lovely and wise and good. Seek for her some man whose soul is at peace. I cannot build a house or beget children or establish a business of my own."

"Why, will you leave us?"

"Not today nor tomorrow, if you would have me stay. But I know that the day will come."

He quoted the true and comfortable old *Midrash* that a man who has no children is even like a man who is dead.

"I cannot, I must not," I cried, "Let that suffice you!"

Sorrowfully he turned from me. How sorrowfully I knew from his muttering the tragic exclamation of the stricken and resigned: "*Adonai dayan ha-emeth!* The Eternal is a judge of truth!"

As for me, I went out into the open. The house seemed to crush me. I could not endure the sight of my

friend's sorrow. I could not face Chava, fair and good, with the glow of her eyes upon me.

This conversation and this incident took place at the end of the second year of my stay in Strasbourg. Many things were revealed to me by it. Nay, let me be truthful: not revealed, but brought from darkness to light and from dream to day. For the thoughts concerning our people and its fate had been continually with me. I had been watching the two young men, Max and Baruch. They were not happy men. They had of late been in Paris; they had also been in Berlin. They would not dream of dwelling in the capital of the French kingdom where the Jews were, according to them, living in utter darkness and hopeless oppression; concerning Berlin they admitted the continuance of hateful taxes and exactions, such as the new humiliating ordinance by which Jews were forced to buy the products of the porcelain factory of the state. None but the eldest son of a "protected Jew" could inherit his father's place and privilege; a tax as high as 80,000 Prussian thaler was demanded for the "protection" and establishment of another son. Yet a small group of wealthy Jews had been, as it were, so solidly entrenched in the country by the policies of Frederic the Great that this group, under the leadership of Moses Mendelssohn and David Itzig, began to live in every way like the rich Christian burghers of the Prussian city and to cultivate the social graces and literary tastes of the gentile world.

This group in Berlin was the object of the yearning of the sons of Cerfberr. They plagued their father to give them each a fortune wherewith they hoped to establish themselves in Berlin. But this he was in no wise ready to do having, among other things, a deep loyalty to the

French monarchy under which he had prospered and not desiring that his sons should abandon the Jews of Alsace, who still lived in great misery and abjectness. But Max and Baruch resented both of these sentiments which their father entertained, especially the latter. They were the first Jews I had ever seen—for I knew not that Isaac de Pinto who had aroused my grandfather's wrath—who, seeing an escape for themselves, had no shadow of compassion for their people but who, like mercenary soldiers on a doubtful field of battle, were willing to cry: *Sauve qui peu*, and, leaving their comrades to whatever fate, go over to the enemy.

I watched them. We lived and worked together. They were not happy. I asked myself: had I not been of the same mind? Nay, not wholly. I had gone forth, I sincerely hoped, to make a way, to plough a path. Perhaps I had gone astray through love of Marguerite, but not consciously so. Not so they. They desired merely to become one with a favored group. I could hear in their speech; I perceived by gesture and intonation what they in turn must have received from their friends in Berlin: a Jewish aristocracy there, an aristocracy of wealth and German culture, would escape from bond and contumely and throw its brethren an alms. They did not plan this thing with open astuteness. Their little jests and contemptuous observations showed their temper. Also the sullenness with which they went to morning prayer and covered their heads at meals. Oh, it was not this after which I had once striven, but to lead a liberated people out into the world's sunlight.

Once their father's wrath blazed openly. Poor wanderers and gatherers of alms were at the board on sabbath eve. Max and Baruch Cerfberr treated these bearded

figures in greenish *caftans* with open disrespect. They nudged each other and whispered an imitation of the Jewish jargon. Cerfberr's face was stiff with sternness. He waited till the sabbath was over. Then he spoke. "They were elders and righteous men in Israel. My father spoke not otherwise. I do not strive for our people in order that my sons may vent their folly upon that people. You might well take an example from little Chava, your sister."

Yes, Chava was not like her brothers. She, too, knew the languages and read the books of the world. But she had no ugly false pride or contempt. Often she acted as her father's almoner in the villages near Strasbourg, where at this very time Jews were harried by cruel exactions and by the cancellation of their debtors' obligations. More than once I drove out with her to protect and advise her, since her brothers would not. She was earnest, though not without glints of a quaint gaiety. She was modest after the way of our maidens, yet I always felt a sense of grief with her. For I was more and more afraid that her heart was going out to me and perhaps she knew that her father's wishes were with her heart. How beautiful she was and how full of goodness! Often enough I blamed myself for not loving her. I could not. She was even as a sister to me. My soul and my flesh were forevermore betrothed and I was another's beyond all change and circumstance. I knew that Marguerite had heard, even though despite herself, the sharp and bitter revelation of Lisette; she knew who I was and where I could be found. I had to await that holy breathing of the Eternal of which my grandfather had spoken, or go widowed to my grave. 'Twas true enough as a matter of words that I would better serve this world in

which I had been placed by pursuing the steady way of life which my fathers had pursued before me and of which Herz Cerfberr was so handsome an example. But even as I must wait for Marguerite, so I knew that I had in other stranger ways than were offered in this city and in this way of life to seek to know and understand what could redeem Israel and so help to redeem the world. And in a way I did not understand these two quests and these two waitings became one, and a mystic conviction grew within me that the more deeply I penetrated into the fate of my people by so much the nearer would I be to seeing my beloved once again. Hence I was disquieted even by the wild and repulsive rumours that came from Offenbach in Hessa of the insane and blasphemous actions of that half-mystic sectary, half-criminal charlatan Jacob Frank, who had set up his "court" in that German city after he had betrayed so many of our brethren of the East into apostasy. Max and Baruch Cerfberr flew into rages at these tales and rumours as serving to disgrace the Jewish people and hinder that people's progress toward a better life. And they were right. Yet I was tempted, foolishly no doubt, to dispute with them. For what they hated was not Frank's apostasy nor his evil ways. Had he been mere criminal, they would have smiled. It was his mystic pretensions that they loathed and that infuriated them. And it came to my mind that they would not act otherwise were a prophet to arise or were the true Messiah, the *Mashiah ben David* himself to come. For he would make to turn awry their plans for conciliation with the world.

These conversations often took place when Chava was present. And whether it was by reason of her affec-

tion for me or of a likeness of temper, she would in her tranquil way side with me. She also entertained, however, as much as her innate goodness permitted her to do, a dislike of her brothers' ways and thoughts. She had gradually seen them become what they were today. She remembered them as boys, studious and obedient. Little by little a hard, sharp restlessness had come upon them both. And this restlessness had increased with the growth of their father's wealth and standing. She thought that it had become acute after a General Quartermaster of the King's armies had visited Cerfberr's house and had sat down to meat with the Jewish purveyor of uniforms and his family and had borne himself with ease and without undue condescension.

I asked her why she thought that this thing was so. She answered that she was not entirely mistress of all the arguments that were used; she knew only this and felt it deeply: that her brothers were not proud, as they often feigningly declared themselves to be. They were, indeed, dreadfully abject. They were like soldiers who were so frightened that they would submit to any indignity and any dishonor if only the enemy would spare their lives. I asked her next, trembling within at the thought of my own adventures, what they were so afraid of? She declared that what they feared so was the necessity of living the lives that Jews had been forced for so many centuries to live. The fortitude and pride of the generations had gone out of them; they had lost the power to despise the pagan world of injustice and cruelty. They were ready to share its injustice and its cruelty, its wars and its hatreds—aye, even to its hatred of the Jewish people—if only it would accept them as a part of itself, if only it would permit them to be other

than other Jews today and to be Jews no more, no more at all, tomorrow. Tears were in her eyes as she ended.

I pressed her hands in mine. Her breathing beauty, her flowering womanliness were near to overcoming me. I knew that my stay in Strasbourg was coming to an end. I must no longer deceive Chava even with my friendship; I must go forth to penetrate more deeply the nature of this strange unquiet age in which our lots were cast.

Chapter Eleven

THERE was a quiet pastoral path on the banks of the river Ill to which I often repaired to be alone with my thoughts. Thither I went to compose myself after that scene with Chava. It was a bright day of spring and the sun sparkled on the waters of the river. The willows trembled and from a boat in the midst of the narrow stream came the sound of a boatman's singing. 'Twas a song of the Alsatian folk he sung that had of late days come up, a song concerning a miller whose daughter had been wronged by a nobleman, and a new anger of the common people against their overlords was in the song. The song bade the miller run after the nobleman as a cat pursues a mouse, and the boatman on the Ill put into the refrain a gay and bold ferocity:

*"Lauf Miller, lauf wie die Katz auf die Maus . . .
Mein liewer Miller lauf!"*

People were rebelling against the old ways of the world. Had I not done so too? Had I not, in truth, sought to flee from fate? Ah me, that was it! That, too, was the way of the brothers of Chava. I once, and they now,

sought to escape our fate. The people of Europe would some day try to change their fate; rumours came to us here from France of sullenness and bitterness, of disobedience and fiery muffled threats. Perhaps Valdes had been right. Perhaps torches would flare in the dark and set fire to the four corners of the kingdom; perhaps there would be set up a scaffold in a high place and heads, the guilty and the innocent, roll in the patient dust. Would that avail us? Would it avail us unless the hearts of men were changed toward us?

The bright scene grew dark before my eyes; its pastoral peace vanished. I felt a faintness run through my members and, desiring not now to return to the house of Cerfberr, I took my way through the Lane of the Blue Clouds, as it had been called from of old, toward the center of the town. This was a secret way which I had pursued before. It happened to be true, neither to my joy nor to my sorrow, that I was not easily recognized as a Jew by strangers in the public ways and streets, as were the sons of Cerfberr, and so escaped the cries and children's jeers to which we were subjected in that day and in that place.

I reached the great square and turned into a narrow lane called the Lane of the Tube, where stood an ancient tavern. Here I had from time to time gone to drink a glass of the excellent wine of the Moselle, light and bright and not heady. Once more I found a place at the extreme, dim end of the long host's table which filled almost the entire room. Only one other person was in the room, a ruddy man with a leaf-green waistcoat over his huge belly, who had, as it would seem, been drinking for a long time, so quietly steeped was he in mellowness. He neither greeted me nor looked my way when I bade

the handsome barmaid, blond of tresses and bare of arms, fetch me a measure of white wine. Only now and again the tranquil old toper would sing in a low hoarse voice to himself a stave of the song concerning the younker who prayed the Death of Basel to fetch his wicked old wife. "Bi-Ba-Basil," he hummed in his wine-choked basso.

At the same moment the maid brought me my measure of wine from the cellar, the door leading to the Lane of the Tube opened wide. Two young men came in and stood still for a minute, as though to accustom their eyes to the dimmer light that came in through the green of the leaded window-panes. The younger and taller wore a pike-grey costume trimmed with gold. His erectness and head thrown slightly back made him appear taller than he was. His large black eyes were full of light; light, as it were, streamed from them. His nose was boldly aquiline; his chin had still a touch of the delicacy of boyhood; his wavy dark-brown hair was tied with a simple ribbon behind. The fire of those eyes rested upon me for an instant. Then he turned to his companion, a grey clerical figure, stern, with blood-shot eyes and faint lines as of anger or contempt about the mouth. "Ha," he exclaimed, "'tis well to be here today and not at our Mistress Lauth on Garlic Lane, despite our friends and fellows at that board. I have been in the sky and cannot so easily return to earth."

He led the way, his grey friend following him, to the host's table where I sat alone. The barmaid pushed out two chairs near mine. I know not why, but I was impelled to rise. Those fiery mystic dark eyes were upon me; that voice acknowledged my courtesy: "Wolfgang Goethe, *Studiosus juris*." He turned to his companion

and spoke for him: "Candidate for Holy Orders Johann Gottfried Herder."

Softly but clearly, under the spell of those eyes which suddenly seemed to radiate an unaffected kindliness, I said: "Josué Vidal."

"Ha, *Monsieur est Français?*"

The blood of all my body surged to my heart. "*Je suis Juif d'origine Provençal, mais je parle l'allemand assez couramment.*"

A tinge of both astonishment and amusement came into those lustrous eyes. The round face of Herder grew a shadow greyer and lines appeared on his tall forehead. But he who called himself Wolfgang Goethe bowed in courteous acknowledgement and, at a gesture from him, we all took our seats. He gave me a shadowy smile, as though sorry that he had now to shut me out, and turned to the barmaid, who grew rosy and full-bosomed under his gaze.

"My child," he cried, "I'm hungry as a wolf; so is my friend. Seethe eggs, bake a fish, fetch wine!"

Herder smiled with a touch of indulgence.

"You said you had been in the sky. Tell me concerning that. I knew not that sky-faring makes a man hungry."

Goethe threw back his head. "'Tis not so easy to get near the sky. I climbed the many, many steps up the tower of the cathedral. Just below the vane that tops the spire, there is a platform without parapet no more than large enough for one's two feet. There stood I, there gazed, there breathed."

Again there was indulgence in the older man's smile.

"Have a care! Our friend Lerse tells me that when you and he go boating on the Rhine you fall into strange

raptures and utter prophetic words and make him fear for your reason."

Goethe laughed and his long brown loosely tied locks shook.

"Neither the good Lerne nor you need fear for me. But there must be hours that burn. For the springtime is in my heart and yet the small adventures that come to me unsought are but as raindrops in a pool and move me no more than such a pool is stirred by a tranquil evening's rain."

"Are Homer and the Bible, Shakespeare and Ossian not enough to stir you?" Herder asked.

The face of Goethe was shadowed, although the great eyes glowed. "All is naught without love. Yet think not, Herder, that I know not this: If ever one enters the fairy realms of one's yearning, and knows them to be such, one is yet not happier by the breadth of a hair. For fate always adds some odd overweight to the sum of one's bliss that spoils the balance. All is awry that should have been so fair; a late frost kills both joy and bloom. It takes courage, dear friend, not to wax melancholy in this world."

Now the maid brought the ordered dishes. Goethe fell upon them heartily and drank deep of the wine. Herder first touched a kerchief to his eyes that appeared to ache. Then he, too, ate with healthy relish.

Between mouthfuls he asked: "What have your studies been?"

"Our rector here is greatly impressed by the esthetic treatises of the worthy Moses Mendelssohn of Berlin. Therefore, I read them. The Berlin sage has sought to catch beauty in a net and to pin it down in a cabinet of rarities, as the naturalist doth a butterfly. Nor did he fail

to do so. But, alas, beauty is in truth like the butterfly. Dead in the cabinet it is no longer a whole creature. It lacks an element of importance, of the very chiefest importance—life and the spirit which alone make all things beautiful.”

Herder nodded.

“When will they learn that poetry is naught else but the mother tongue itself of the human race? ’Tis not stiff artifice, but man and nature themselves flowering into beauty and meaning.”

For a little while the two ate and drank in silence. The barmaid had quietly brought me another measure of wine. Perhaps the warmth of the wine gave me the courage not to go. I did, indeed, desire ardently to stay. For I had never heard such words of life from so glorious a human being as this young man. I remembered the words I had heard concerning the cultivation of the Muses in France and the verses that had been read. His image of the dead butterfly in a cabinet of rarities was a fit similitude for all I had heard and known. And had he mentioned, though disagreeing with him, Moses Mendelssohn of Berlin in a tone of respect and honor because of me? I knew not; I burned to know; I dared not yet go forth from this place and this presence.

He and his friend had finished their repast. Goethe asked the wine cups to be replenished. He leaned back in his chair and folded his arms over his breast.

“I feel the need of freer forms and the need to break mere formal boundaries and, above all, to grasp more boldly into the very depths of humanity itself. The poets of England must be our guides. Here in Germany all, both the greater and the less, the significant and the trivial, cling to mere shell and mere convention. I have

a small example, Herder, one of many—one which—” suddenly he turned to me with an earnest look in his dark eyes—“will interest Monsieur.”

I bowed. I knew I had no words, nor wanted any, to match his. I was content to hear, to learn, to drink every drop in the cup of this hour.

“They sent me from Frankfurt recently,” Goethe said, “a well-printed volume of verses. What do you think was its title? *Poems by a Polish Jew*. Never was I more happily impressed. Here, I said to myself, a fiery mind and a feeling heart that have dwelt until now under a strange harsh heaven suddenly enter our world. I looked once more at the frontispiece and beheld with pleasure the face of a handsome youngster with powdered hair and smooth-shaven chin and even admired the gold piping on his green coat. All things in our world are new to him, I reflected. What emotions will be awakened in his bosom and what reflections in his mind! How much will seem vivid to him to which custom has staled us! He will discover new springs of pleasure that flow beneath our sated indifference and reacquaint us with our own wealth. An hundred matters, on the other hand, that we endure will seem unendurable to him. He will find what he does not seek and seek what can not be found. Then he will communicate to us his feelings and his thoughts in free, new songs.”

He stopped and took a sip of wine. He drew himself up and, fixing upon me a glance of accusing severity, continued: “Such were my hopes! Were they not just? And what did I find? Windy emptiness. The fellow had studied the so-called graces of letters for a period and found it easy to imitate the elegant little verses of the age. ’Tis praiseworthy for a Polish Jew to renounce trade,

to learn German, to cultivate the Muses, to write verse. But if, in the end, he produces nothing other than any ordinary Christian dabbler in literature, 'tis ill done to make so great a pothor about his Jewishness. Mediocrity, as Horace said, is hateful to gods and men."

He sprang up impulsively and called for the reckoning. The barmaid hastened to his side. He did not regard her now. He dropped the coins into her hand. He seemed to me to have grown pale with some strong inner excitement that had naught to do either with the place, the company or the words he had just spoken. His glance fell upon me. He bowed slightly. Stormily he strode toward the door. About the lips of Herder, who followed him in silence, there was the shadow of a disapproving smile.

They were gone. I looked vaguely about me. The green-clad toper who had been here when I entered was gone too. No one had observed his departure. The place seemed wonderfully empty and my heart was desolate. The barmaid came in and began to talk as I paid for my two measures of wine.

"The Magister Goethe often comes here with his friends. Does he not speak beautifully? Sometimes he reads poetry. Oh, you should hear him! They say he is from Frankfurt-am-Main and is a rich councillor's son. They say—"

But I could not endure to hear more. I tipped her and fled, and saw out in the lane that it was near dusk, and remembered that it was Friday, the eve of the sabbath, and hastened home. I knew with more certainty than ever that I would not stay much longer in Strasbourg and I desired not to wound my friend Cerfberr.

When, having washed and donned my sabbath gar-

ments, I came down the stairs all the family was already assembled. Of guests there was on that sabbath eve but one. Cerfberr took me by the hand and led me to a corner of the room where stood a tall grave man with ripe-red lips shimmering out from his black beard and blue eyes that contrasted with his darkness. Cerfberr explained that this was the Rabbi Joseph Michelsohn of Berlin, who had come for a brief period to Alsace to collect debts due to the estate of his aged father who had died a few months before. I was surprised to see a Berliner in the long black *caftan* worn by the Jews of Poland and Lithuania. His silken cap, moreover, was not the small round skullcap that the other men and I, too, wore. It was tall and stiff and somehow formidable. He raised his hands a little deprecatingly at Cerfberr's explanation of his presence here.

"True that I have come upon this errand. But forget not, Reb Herz and Reb Jehoshu'a, that every journey has a meaning and a purpose of which the journeyer is not aware. These are God's meaning and God's purpose for him."

Cerfberr smiled.

"Nevertheless, when the sabbath is over I shall give you directions how to seek out most easily the debtors and correspondents in Colmar and Schlestadt."

The blue eyes of the Rabbi Michelsohn lit up with a stern kind of merriment.

"So you are rationalists here too, as are all the *balabatim* and elders and leaders in the Prussian capital."

"Not I," I was impelled to exclaim. "Not I, Reb Joseph. I heard and read a great deal concerning the use of the reason to improve the condition of men in France. It seems to me I learned this: that men use their reason

when they write or converse and then live and act according to their instincts and prejudices."

A glow came into Michelsohn's face.

"You are right. We Jews knew that once. We said that an inner change, a return of the heart to God and good alone availed. And now!"

His eyes, stern as steel, looked beyond me and I knew that he was seeing Max and Baruch Cerfberr and I knew, too, that he was not only seeing them but seeing *into* them, and I was aware of the strangeness of the circumstance that I was in nowise astonished at this power of the Rabbi Joseph Michelsohn of gazing straight into the very hearts of men.

We were called to the table on which burned the candles which Rachel Cerfberr had blessed. And now the ceremonies of ushering in the sabbath were performed. There was about our guest a happy devoutness, the like of which I had not seen. He served God with joy; he was a Jew with gladness. "Who has separated us from all the peoples!" None could have mistaken the nature of his assent to this saying which had once seemed arrogant and morose to me, almost as it did to Monsieur de Voltaire. He was glad that Israel was set apart for the service of the Eternal and the consecration of life and the bearing of a prophetic message from generation to generation.

Huge carps were brought in on platters of silver. The wine was from a special vineyard on a sun-warmed slope near the mountain of Sainte-Odile. Cerfberr had grown richer than ever during these last few years and leased this vineyard because the vintage pleased him. Chava in rose-colored silk, dotted with painted forget-me-nots, arose from time to time to help serve the guests, and I ob-

served the wistful eye of her father turn from her to me.

Max Cerfberr asked the Rabbi Michelsohn for news of Berlin. He asked after the health and well-being of the great Moses Mendelssohn and his family, as well as the families Kisch and Bernhardt and Gumpertz, who had all shown hospitality to the sons of Cerfberr.

Michelsohn shook his head.

"I am sorry. I know nothing. I saw Moses Mendelssohn for the last time more than a year ago. He is a good man and one to whom God has given great gifts. But I went to him to warn him concerning the consequences of all that he does and of the example which he provides."

"But he is our hope and pride," Max Cerfberr cried. "He has advanced our cause and helped us to be held in esteem as none other has done."

The Rabbi Joseph Michelsohn laid his knife and fork neatly across his plate. He lifted his massive head. There was silence in the room. "He has been esteemed by great and good men. But they have esteemed him despite the fact that he is a Jew and for accomplishments which they expected not of a Jew. None esteemed him because he is a Jew. He has caused Jews to be esteemed not in so far as they are Jews but in the hope that they may cease to be such. What will be the end? What, I ask you, young man, will be the end?"

Max Cerfberr looked sullen. "I do not grasp your meaning."

"My meaning is that a prize will be set upon apostasy and a prize will be set upon false seeming and upon untruth, and Israel will crumble away as a flint crumbles under the blows of an iron hammer. But it will not crumble wholly away. The *Shearith Yisrael*, the remnant,

will remain, and the day may come when that remnant will pay for this defiance of God who is *Adonai Emeth*, a God of truth."

A vision came to me of my grandfather. Had he not spoken almost those words?

"What shall we do, Reb Joseph?" I asked. "Tell me, what shall we do?"

The blue eyes were fixed on me with a warm yet penetrating glance.

"I am gathering what monies are left of my father's estate. I am taking my wife and children and going to Warsaw to dwell there where, it is my hope, this enlightenment will not penetrate and this long, grievous tragedy will not be enacted."

Cerfberr was clasping and unclasping his hands. "How shall we be liberated? Have you no heart for your people?"

Rachel Cerfberr also lifted up her voice. "Are we to wait for the Messiah?"

Michelsohn bowed his head a little. "Far in the East, in a Polish town called Kosnitz, dwells a rabbi who prays daily as follows: 'O Eternal, if Thou wilt not redeem Israel, then redeem the nations!'"

I felt my eyes grow moist. "My grandfather, the Rabbi Moshe ben Yitzchak Ventura, said the identical thing to me."

Michelsohn stretched out his arms toward me. "Then flee! Flee, as I am fleeing."

Baruch Cerfberr drew himself up. "With all due respect to rabbis and elders, I must protest. In Paris and Berlin, in London and Amsterdam, in Frankfurt-am-Main and even here, we are witnessing the beginnings of a new age of enlightenment, tolerance, humanity. That age is still at dawn. But the sun rises fast. Friends in Berlin

told my brother and me that the emancipation of the Jews is now a matter not of decades but of years. It will be achieved if we Jews prove that we are human beings like other human beings, and once achieved it will be everlasting. Reason is eternal and is our highest guide. Reason is speaking; reason will have spoken and the sorrows and oppressions of our people will be as forgotten as the torturing of men practiced by savages or the human sacrifices to cruel gods in the temples of the remotest antiquity."

Cerfberr looked with pride upon his younger son. "I did not know that you had ordered the arguments so well in your mind."

A great sadness fell upon the face of Michelsohn. "'Tis the Berlin formula. All the young men and all the young women repeat it. Though Mendelssohn does not so declare it, he lends countenance to it. My children are still young; it is for their sake and for the sake of *their* children that I am fleeing."

Cerfberr chewed his beard.

"What if they are right—these young people? Rothschild of Frankfurt is of their way of thinking."

The Rabbi Michelsohn folded his hands.

"If they are right it will mean the gradual absorption of Israel by the nations. It will mean the death and disappearance of Israel. It will mean that Israel, after its long wanderings and sufferings, will fade, like Babylonians and Assyrians, like Greece and Edom; it will mean that our martyrdom has had neither significance nor purpose. Place your hand upon your heart, Reb Cerfberr, and tell me that you believe that to be possible?"

Cerfberr's vivid head drooped.

Chava lifted a soft and trembling voice. "But if we are to wait for the Messiah, Reb Joseph, when will He come? How will we know him?"

Michelsohn unclasped his hands. A great beauty came upon his face and shone from his blue eyes.

"Once upon a time, my child, the Rabbi Jehoshu'a ben Levi met the prophet Elijah at the mouth of that cave to which the great and holy Shimon ben Yochai had retired to meditate.

"Jehoshu'a asked the prophet: 'When will Messiah come?'

"The prophet made answer: 'Go ask him himself.'

" 'Where sitteth he?'

" 'At the gates of Rome.'

" 'By what sign shall I know him?'

"The prophet said: 'He sitteth among beggars and outcasts who are covered with sores and wounds. All the others change the poor bandages on their sores and wounds at one time. He, on the contrary, changes the bandage on only a single wound at a time. He needs to be ready at every moment. He knows not when he will be called. If he is called he must not tarry.'

"Jehoshu'a went to the gates of Rome and recognized him of whom the prophet had spoken. He approached him and said: 'Peace be with thee, my Master.'

"The other answered: 'And peace be with thee, thou son of Levi.'

"Now Jehoshu'a asked: 'When comest thou?'

"The other replied: 'Today!'

"Sadly Jehoshu'a hastened back to the prophet Elijah and cried out: 'Alas that he should deceive me! He said: I come today. And he has not come.'

"Elijah made answer: 'His meaning was: today—if ye hearken unto my voice!'

The Third Book

EVANGEL AND RETURN

Chapter One

I LEFT Strasbourg not without sorrow or regret in the high summer of the year 1771. That mystical feeling that if I but penetrated more and more deeply into the being and fate of Israel I would be drawing Marguerite more and more closely to myself, had grown deeper and stronger. I knew that my grandfather's spirit was watching with mine; the words and plans of the Rabbi Michelsohn had been like a torch kindled before my eyes. From *Mizrach*, from the East, had redemption come ere now; perhaps it would come again both for my people and for my troubled heart.

I bade farewell to Cerfberr. With compressed lips he said that he would miss me. He asked whether I knew where I was going and upon what quest; he desired to know whether I had written to my father. I could satisfy him on the last point. Friendly, though formal, letters had passed from time to time between my father and me. I had told him now that I was traveling eastward, I knew not for how long. Cerfberr then pressed me upon the former point. He said that perhaps he had some small right to ask, seeing that he had conceived a great affection for me and also that he was acting as my financial agent.

I was bound to tell him that I was not wholly sure myself of the purpose of my travels. But this, I argued as much to myself as to him, was perhaps the nature of any wayfaring into any but the beaten roads. I gave him some small account of that flight of mine into the world that occasioned my knowledge of the now almost forgotten petition of the Companies of merchants and traders of Paris to the French King. He had known the fact but not the manner of its coming about. I sought to satisfy him by saying that I knew a change was coming over the world. So much was sure; it was in the very air. Therefore, some change would come for the Jews too. But I was not satisfied with any of the ways which were being trodden in the direction of that change. I wanted neither banking nor trading for us, though I begged him not to think me so foolish as not to know that men must have bread; I wanted not mere favors nor mere tolerance at some price which could in the nature of things be neither honorable to demand nor yet to pay.

We turned by a common accord at this point and saw that Chava had slipped into the counting-house where we were. She came toward us. She was pale but her face burned from within with a passionate grief.

"All that he says is wise and true, Father," she cried. "But I know another thing about Josué, though he has meant to reveal nothing. 'Tis an anguish of the heart that drives him from place to place; 'tis a thing he cannot and will not forget. Are you angry with me for having spoken, Josué? I should not like you to leave me in anger."

She bowed her beautiful dark head and wept.

Cerfberr looked at me with earnest searching eyes.

"If it be so," I said, "there is no profit in telling the

tale, nor does it change one whit the matters of which we have spoken. I have often thought that there are those who cannot from the beginning be satisfied even with the good ordinary ways of men. Perhaps I am one of those. If that be so, 'tis not, you may believe me, a happy fate."

I turned to Chava and took her hands in mine. "You must forget me."

She smiled a sorrowful smile. "Have you found it so easy to forget?"

She would not stay for my answer but ran fleetly out of the counting-house. I scarcely saw her thereafter, nor did I see Cerfberr alone again. I made all preparations for my long and difficult journey from Strasbourg to Stuttgart, thence to Prague in Bohemia, where I rested for some days in the shadow of the immemorial Gothic synagogue, and from there again to Breslau, from which city I set out for the kingdom of Poland and its capital city of Warsaw. Often on these long journeyings, not being easily recognizable as a Jew, I mingled freely with the people of the country. They lived not otherwise than they had done for centuries; their superstitions had not changed. They half believed that Jews used Christian blood to bake the unleavened cakes of Passover, even though the Pope Clement XIII had issued an encyclical letter branding the belief as a cruel slander; seeing the sore poverty of nearly all Jews, they yet held them to be secretly rich; also they thought all Jews to be monstrously astute and, upon being asked why a people, if it were in truth subtle and powerful, should permit itself to dwell in such want and oppression, they answered with a smile which seemed to say: "We are not so simple as to be duped by appearances."

In the city of Warsaw the Rabbi Joseph Michelsohn received me in his simple house. Only a few hundred families were permitted to dwell within the boundaries of the city, and they had to pay a daily tax for that privilege to the Marshal of the Kingdom Lubomirski. But some of the great nobles, recognizing the usefulness of Jewish traders, had permitted two settlements to grow up on the outskirts of the city. And one of these noblemen was a Count Potocki and the name of the settlement of Jews was Novy Potock. Thither the Rabbi Michelsohn, when I refused longer to burden him, counseled me to go, saying that there at an inn I would find Jews from all the corners of Poland and especially many of those who were now called *Chasidim*, or righteous men, the followers of the Rabbi Israel ben Elieser whom they called the *Ba'al-shem-tob*, the good master of the Divine Name, who had performed wonders and inaugurated a new way of life before his death about a decade ago.

The inn at Novy Potock was kept by a man named Aaron, a slight and agile fellow. He was talkative, too, and not much given to shame, and exclaimed over my "German" clothes, as he called them here where everything both elegant and heretical was half despised and half admired under the appellation "German." I asked him concerning the *Chasidim*, the righteous ones. He winked and whistled. Upon my pressing him, he said that the rabbinical authorities of many cities, led by the famous scholar and teacher, the Gaon Eliyahu of Vilna, were fiercely opposed to the followers of the *Ba'al-shem-tob* and to his disciples, and had threatened them with both the lesser and the greater ban. They accused the *Chasidim* of unseemly riotousness, of neglecting study and right practice, even of blasphemy and of loose and

dishonorable ways. He stood before me as he spoke, swaying on his hips from side to side.

"So they meet in secret?" I asked.

He shook his head so that his side-locks flew. "Never! But you are a stranger and I thought it right to tell you how things stand. We are too full of joy to be afraid."

"Then you are a Chasid?"

Again his ear-locks flew, this time forth and back with his passionate nodding.

"Aye, I am! I am a man of little knowledge. But I have been taught to pray so that the wound of the universe that cleaves it in twain is healed, and God and the Divine Abiding are at one again within it."

"How do you achieve that?" I asked.

His eyes began to glow.

"He who desires with love a beautiful woman does not much regard the flowing, manicolored robes in which she may be clad; his heart is fixed upon the reality of her. Others who do not love her see only the bright silks and curling ribbons. So he who desires truly to grasp God sees in all the things of the world only Him, only the fashioner of the beginning of all, whose power and glory streams through His garments. But there are those who even when they pray see only garments, only things."

I was astonished.

"Who taught you that image and its meaning?"

"It came to us in the dance one time when the young Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Derbarmdiger was here and danced with us."

"Derbarmdiger?" I asked. "Does that not mean the compassionate one?"

Aaron laughed. "Aye! So is he called by Pole and Jew,

because he cries out: 'God the Compassionate' and all feel that compassion is had upon them."

Now two others entered the taproom, but not together. For these two were exceedingly different. One was a dapper, clean-shaven young man in the clothes of the West, like myself, but with powdered hair and a three-cornered hat. He lifted his nose as though prepared for an evil odor; he raised his eyebrows; he looked about with a birdlike motion of his head. Then he espied me and, striding toward me, took off his hat and bowed deep. I chose not to offend either Aaron or the other man who had entered, a great, tall bearded Jew in the boots of a peasant, by imitating this un-Jewish gesture in this place. The young man took no notice of my coolness. He introduced himself in French as Monsieur Jacques Calmanson of Warsaw. He had heard that I was here and hoped that I was here for the same purpose as himself. I asked him what that purpose was.

"What can it be, Monsieur, except to fight and restrain, if need be by force, the goings-on of this rabble that calls itself *Chasidim*?"

"Why should you wish to do so?" I asked.

Again he raised his eyebrows. "How can we contribute to the perfectibility of the poor backward Jews of Poland, if the masses of them yield to new superstitions and to wild and stupid sectarianism? How, Monsieur, would an account of what is happening here impress Monsieur de Voltaire in his Swiss retreat or the great Monsieur Lessing in his study? A man acquainted with the great world, as you are, surely understands that we can make progress only by perfecting ourselves!"

At this moment a group of men, all strong and heavy and in rough coats and tall boots, came stamping in.

They greeted the first, tall man who had come in by the name of Hershko and ordered brandy. Esther, the slim red-headed wife of Aaron, appeared in the room to serve them. There was a great hubbub. The men had evidently come to hear a tale that Hershko had to tell.

"Look at them," Calmanson said to me in a mincing voice, "and hear their barbarous jargon! It will be hard enough to improve them, not to speak of perfecting them, without new horrors."

"Where are you from originally, Monsieur?" I inquired.

"From Warsaw. But I have traveled and informed myself—"

A happy urgent crying arose from half a dozen throats. The men gathered closely about Hershko. He assumed the attitude of a man who was about to relate weighty things.

"Let us listen," I said softly to Calmanson.

He shrugged his shoulders but made no objection.

"There had been hail and the peasants could not pay. The Haidamaks had ravaged the countryside. I owed the *Pan* the quarterly lease rent of ninety-one thaler and had almost nothing wherewith to pay. You know the law of the nobles. They can hold a man and also his family in bondage till the money is paid. So a cart came with the *Pan's* bailiffs, and they took me and my wife and my three sons to the estate. They threw me into the swines' stall. What they did with my family I did not at first know. But in spite of the execrable place in which I was, Jews came by night and whispered to me: the *Pan* had permitted my wife and the two older boys to return to the inn I lease, so that trade might go on. But my youngest, named Leiser, who is known far and wide for his great gifts of mind and his knowledge of tongues and his

beauty and his grace—him they had taken to the manor house and put him into the hands of a Jesuit priest, hoping to make an apostate of him both by subtle argument and by the temptations of luxury and the promises of a great career.”

A groan went up from the company. Imprecations flew from bearded lips.

“It was on account of Leiser and what was being done to him that Jews of my village told other Jews. ‘God will help,’ they whispered to me by night. They sent messengers to Ryczivol where dwells our Levi Yitzchak Derbarmdiger who came on foot and gathered money from village to village and sent men to the *Pan* with the ninety-one thalers. So was I released. But the *Pan* and the priest said that it would be blasphemous to return to the sties of the Jews one who had already shown signs of grace working upon him! So Levi Yitzchak caused Jews to procure a great cone of sugar and ten pounds of coffee and to appear with them at the door of the manor house and to plead that Leiser be set free. They wept and cried out unto man and God at the door of that house of trouble and iniquity, and the *Pan* was persuaded, half in shame, to let the boy go free. Yet in the end he laughed and said that another payment of rent was due on the twenty-fourth of October and he might be the cause of making Leiser a bishop yet!”

Groans of sorrow arose.

“Can you not,” someone asked, “get rid of the lease?”

“Nay,” Hershko replied, “It runs for ten years. So the *Pan* decreed. I knew not then how unprofitable it was. He knew; he laughs over the bargain by which he outwitted a Jew.”

I looked at Calmanson. There was a strange anger in

his eyes. It seemed to me at this moment that he hated these people on account of their very sorrows and the very wrongs that they were made to suffer, and himself for belonging to them.

He arose. "Perhaps we can meet in Warsaw some day and discuss this matter?"

"I do not know, Monsieur Calmanson. I have come here to learn and not to teach."

With a look of malice the fellow left the room. Disdainfully, he did not close the door behind him, and through the opening there slipped in one of the strangest figures ever beheld. 'Twas a man clothed like the other Jews of this country, but small to dwarfishness and delicate and nimble. He showed no deformity to account for his littleness, yet I felt that under his voluminous *caftan* there might be hidden either hump or deformed breast or crooked shoulder. His hands, which he waved in vague greeting, were of an astonishing whiteness and delicacy. His green eyes twinkled with gaiety. Or so, at least, I thought at first. Perhaps he meant them to be gay. But the twinkle was in reality a cold glitter and behind that glitter there was to be perceived a desperate sadness. With an almost dancing motion, he came into the room and then stood still. His glance barely touched me. Suddenly he stamped a small foot on the floor and one of the men sitting with the innkeeper Hershko turned around.

"Aha," he cried, "the Ostropoler! Come, Hersh, come to your almost namesake Hershko and tell him a tale to dispel his sorrow."

The delicate dwarf sat down with the other men.

"I am not merry today," he said. "I am sad."

They laughed.

"You, Hersh Ostropoler, are sad. That is a new thing! Tell the tale of your sadness."

The green eyes glittered. "I have been sad for a long time. My wife laments her folly in having married an ugly dwarf. I told her I was a handsome child enough; robbers came and stole me and left an ugly brat in exchange. Is it my fault?"

His grave tale was greeted with laughter.

"Who would not be sad?" he asked. "So in my sadness I went to see our rebbe, Levi Yitzchak Derbarmidger. I stood beside his table in his study and wept. He raised his hands. 'Hersh, do not weep! I cannot endure it.' I pretended not to have heard his words. Did I not have a right to be sad? Again the rebbe spoke: 'Hersh, you know that there are hours in which I feel in my heart the sorrow and pain of every Jew, from world's end to world's end, as though it were my own. Must you stand here and weep too? Tell me why you are weeping and I will give you ten pieces of silver!' Then I raised up my voice in weeping and said: 'A moment ago you offered me twenty pieces if I would tell you!' The compassionate one laughed and gave me twenty."

"Then you are rich!" said Hershko.

"Rich?" the dwarf asked, and his eyes were wide with wonder. "I have a wife and children and debts and a thirst. I am penniless. Tell Aaron, the keeper of this inn, to bring me brandy."

An older man sitting beside him put a kindly hand on the little man's frail shoulder.

"Why do you drink so much brandy?"

Hersh Ostropoler assumed an expression of childlike innocence.

"The rebbe asked me the same question! And I replied: 'Merciful Rebbe, when I drink I become another man. And then that other man needs a few drinks too. Shall I stint him and let him suffer? Must we not live and let live?' "

The older man laughed, as did they all.

"What is the name of that other man?"

Sadly the Ostropoler said: "Poor devil, he was named Hersh after me."

They ordered him brandy which the red-haired Esther brought. Next he asked them whether a man could live without food.

"You are hungry?" Hershko asked.

"Aye! I came in here to eat and to drink."

"But you knew not that we were here and you say you are penniless. Is Aaron so charitable?"

"Nay," said the Ostropoler, "I know not. But God helps; Jews help. Not long ago I was hungry and thirsty and without a farthing. I went to an inn not fifty leagues from here and ate fish and drank wine and had sweets. The innkeeper asked for the reckoning. He was an angry man when I said I had nothing. 'I will be paid,' he cried, 'even if you, who are a beggar, go out into the village and beg from door to door.' 'You are a wise man,' I said. 'But if I, a poor ragged beggar, go from door to door, the Jews will give but farthings. If you, a respected man in the congregation go with me, they will give more, and you and I can share what is above the amount of the reckoning.' "

They called for more brandy and for food for all. The older man who had warned the jester came over to me. "Reb Yid, Master Jew," he said to me. "My name is

Chayim. You are cold and lonely here. Come and join us. You are from far away, are you not?"

A strange warmth came into my heart, I know not why. I joined the company. I ordered brandy too. They asked me few questions; they did not remark upon the halting manner in which I spoke their language. I had slept late that morning and come late into the taproom. It was now near the setting of the sun and gradually the talk about me turned into a humming and the humming into a singing and the men arose and I arose with them and, turning their faces toward the East, in the direction of Jerusalem, they prayed the afternoon prayer. They recited *Minha* as I had heard the words and repeated them a thousand times. But here in this dim taproom, with now no light save for some faltering rays of the sun's afterglow through narrow windows, there was a great strange vibration in the uplifted voices. Softly they murmured the great *beracha*, the blessing of the Eternal who is the first and the last. Then they raised their voices and praised Him who brings on the evening twilight, with wisdom opens the gates of heaven and arranges the stars in their watches in the sky, who rolls away the light from the darkness and the darkness from the light according to His will. Then sobs, unaffected and from the depth of their very being, broke those voices as they thanked the Eternal for the everlasting love with which He had loved the house of Israel and for the law and commandments, statutes and judgments which He had taught. Tears came into my eyes, too, as they had never come before. A storm seemed to lift us as we all sang the *Shema*, the Hear O Israel of the everlasting years. And then again we were filled, I with them, filled to the brim of our hearts with a knowledge

of the tenderness and loving kindness of the Eternal as we besought Him to cause us to lie down in peace and to raise us up unto life and, at last, at last, *p'deh eth Yisrael mi-khol tsarotav*—to set Israel free from all its troubles.

I had been so absorbed in praying with my fellows that I had been only half conscious of the fact that the volume of chanting voices had been far greater than could have come from the men about me at Hershko's table. Now that the prayer was over Aaron and his wife brought in candles and the room was bright, and near the door I saw standing a company of men who must have softly entered at the beginning of our prayer and must have chanted with us. In front of those men stood the figure of one, a man in his early thirties, whose great soft eyes seemed to absorb into their depths all they saw. His beard was of a silky brown and locks of the same color and texture flowed from under his hat. His form was not large; a tenseness went out from it—a tenseness like a ray that pierced. Hershko and Chayim and the others moved with a joyous reverence toward him. "The Rebbe! Our Rebbe . . . Levi Yitzchak . . . *der Derbarmdiger*—the compassionate one!"

"Peace be with thee!" they cried. Their voices were happy.

And he answered them in his vibrant voice: "And with ye, peace!"

With his followers he now came forward toward the table and all, both those who had been there and those who had come with him, raised their voices, as he was being seated, and sang together a melody both soft and poignant:

“A banner and pearls and a golden chain!
Messiah, son of David, leads our train.
He holds a beaker in his strong right hand,
He spreads his blessing over sea and land.
Amen and amen and this is true
That yet this year he will come to you.

“If he comes a-riding
Good times will be abiding;
If he comes a-driving
Good years will be arriving.
If humbly on foot comes he
Then in the land of Israel will all our dwellings be.”

Chapter Two

I FOUND myself seated next to the Rabbi Levi Isaac, called the Compassionate. His glance had sufficed to bring this about. But he had not rolled his eye nor moved his head. His *Chasidim*, the righteous who were his special adherents and whose rebbe he was, understood him and followed, as it were, his inner commands. They brought him a small glass of the inn's best brandy. He let it stand; he gazed into it; he seemed for the moment weary and quenched. Seeing him thus, the *Chasidim* lowered their voices to a whisper or a soft hum. They seemed not to watch him; they revered the privacies of his thought.

Slowly he raised his head; he turned to me. He laid his hand, long, narrow, delicate and yet commanding, on mine.

"How is it with Israel in the West—in France, Prussia, England? How fare we? Is there a light? Is there darkness?"

I answered that his question was an exceedingly difficult one. Very many Jews, especially the few who had some substance and some privileges, were convinced that their liberation was at hand and that there were in

truth some signs, nay, many, that such an event was possible.

A tension had gradually come back into his body as I was speaking. He seemed now like a flame that had bowed before a wind; the wind had died and the flame burned upward toward the heart of heaven. His eyes were on mine. He needed not to speak. I knew his next question: "Why are you here?"

"There are those who, whether by virtue of experience or reflection or both, are not happy, despite the light in the West. It seems to them an impure light. It seems to them that men of the nations are willing to give Israel freedom only on the understanding that all that Israel has been and suffered and hoped is mean and ugly and of no avail. I am unlearned and not wise. But I could not find satisfaction in the things that are happening."

His eyes did not let mine go. Light from them flowed into me. And not only light. My heart was warm. He was holding my heart; he was holding the heart of all Israel in his hands. The *Chasidim* moved nearer together and strained forward a little. He spoke now.

"Do you remember the passage in the Passover ritual, concerning that 'fourth son . . . who knew not how to ask the right question'? I, Levi Yitzchak, the son of Sara, whom men call the Compassionate, I am that fourth son who does not know how to ask our Father and our King the right question. I know not how to ask and, even though I knew, I would not dare! How would I dare to ask why all things come to pass as they do? How would I dare to ask the Eternal why we are driven from exile to exile and why our adversaries torment us after these ways. Yet in the Passover ritual it is de-

manded of the father of the fourth son that he reveal the meaning to his child, even according to the saying of Scripture: "Then thou shalt say unto thy son!" He ceased. The silence was brief but so deep that we all sank into it. Then he raised his two hands to the sides of his uplifted head. "And am I not Thy child, O King of the Universe? Nor do I beseech Thee to reveal to me the mysteries of Thy way; I could not endure to know them. Only reveal to me, deeper, clearer than before, what these things that are now coming to pass mean to me and demand of me, and what Thou, O Eternal, wouldst proclaim to me through them! I would not know why I suffer, only whether I suffer according to Thy will."

The eyes of the rude men about us shone with unshed tears.

"Dance, Rebbe, dance!" The muffled cry came from the man named Chayim.

Levi Yitzchak's hands dropped wearily. Again he seemed like a half-quenched fire. He shook his head.

"Not today. I have not enough joy today. I am nearer the sorrows of man than the glory of the Divine Presence today."

The *Chasidim* hummed in a soft chorus:

*"Idelach, Chasidimlach,
Koshere talmidimlach;
Git op koved dem reben,
Oi git op koved dem reben!"**

* O Jews, O righteous ones,
Disciples pure of heart,
Give honor to the rabbi,
Oh, give honor to the rabbi!

They hummed the haunting little refrain over and over until they saw that Levi Yitzchak's lips were about to open. Then there was utter silence out of which arose his voice in a chanting tone—half speech, half song, half sob. Never shall I forget that chanting voice nor its mysterious melody.

“’Tis yet three weeks till New Year and the days of dread and penitence and judgment. Yet a woman came running to me today and wept and wept. ‘Why do you weep?’ I asked. And the woman made answer: ‘How should I not weep? My head is full of pain and dread—oh, so full of pain and dread.’ Again I spoke to her: ‘Weep not; the weeping will make greater the pain and the dread.’ She lifted up her sobbing voice: ‘How should I not weep? I have one son and one only, and the great and dreadful days of judgment and of pardon are nigh at hand and I know not whether my son will obtain pardon before God! And I said to her: ‘Weep not, weep not. Assuredly he will obtain pardon. For behold it is written: “For Ephraim is my favorite son, a child of joy. The while I speak against him I remember him. Thus doth my heart go out toward him. Compassionate, compassionate will I be unto him, saith the Lord.” ’ ’ ”

He drew forth a large white kerchief and touched it to his lips and eyes. He now drank the contents of the small glass of brandy before him. “Jews. Thus are Jews. As this woman. Thus.” Again he laid his hand on mine. “What do you do? How do you live? Where will you pass the Good Days, the Dread Days that are coming?”

“I would pass them,” I answered strangely hearing my own voice as though it came from another and from elsewhere, “I would pass the days near you. Where will you be?”

His head drooped on his breast.

"I am rabbi in Pinsk."

A low titter was heard. All heads turned to Hersh Ostropoler, the jester. Levi Yitzchak did not move. The tittering went on like the long chirp of a bird.

"Speak!" Chayim said to the jester.

"In the hour in which our Rebbe Levi Yitzchak was born the *Ba'al-shem-tob* was serving his disciples brandy and cakes with honey, and a great gladness came upon him. Our Master said: 'In this hour a soul descendeth who will be a great advocate of the people Israel. It might turn men toward good and break the power of evil.' A disciple asked: 'And will it? Will it?' The Master made an answer: 'The world will give that soul a rabbinical office and it will not have much time or strength left wherewith to bring Jews to repentance.' "

A low sound of laughter went through the company. Levi Yitzchak raised his head. Those burning eyes smiled. He lifted his hand.

"When first a year ago I accepted the rabbinate at Pinsk I made the officers of the congregation promise me not to invite me to their meetings and assemblies until it was in their mind to introduce a new custom or a new contrivance. Yet within a week they asked and urged me to come to their assembly. 'Peace with you,' I said upon entering. 'What is the new custom or contrivance that you plan?' They answered: 'We would that henceforth the poor assemble no longer at the gates of the synagogue. We will hang up a box of tin instead, into which the well-to-do can drop alms according to the ability of each.' When I heard this I said: 'Did I not beg you not to tear me away from prayer and study and meditation on account of old customs and contrivances?'

The elders lifted their hands in astonishment. 'Surely this is a new thing that we have devised.' 'You err,' I cried. "'Tis almost as old as earth. Sodom and Gomorra knew this thing. You know the tale of the maiden of Sodom who gave bread to a beggar, on which account the Sodomites stripped her and bound her and smeared her with honey and set her among the bees to be stung to death? Doubtless those people had communal alms-boxes of tin in order that the rich might not meet the eyes of their brethren who were poor!'"

Once more the men, both those of this place and those who had come with the rabbi, chanted that little refrain of "give honor to the Rabbi!" Then Hershko, the inn-keeper, arose from his seat.

"We are poor men and oppressed men whom you have helped. But you and your *Chasidim* are going away from us, if not tonight, then by dawn. Give us a word; leave us a good word of comfort before you go."

A murmur of assent ran through the room. Levi Yitzchak looked long into the eyes of Hershko, the inn-keeper. He saw that the man's eyes were full of suffering and of fear and also of indignation. He lifted up his face and a flame seemed to tremble within him.

"It is written; we know that it is written: With Thee, O Eternal is justice and with us is the shame of the countenance. But because of what, O Eternal, are we to be ashamed? Because we are beaten and driven and slaughtered for the sake of the Holy Name? Let them, let *them* be ashamed who drive and oppress us, and do Thou be ashamed who beholdest these things and remediest them not! With Thee is justice, O Eternal—if Thou protectest us and puttest an end to our shame!"

He drooped. He bent forward and laid his head on the

table. His soft brown hair fell forward from under his hat on the wood. Hershko and Chayim and the other men paid Aaron their reckoning quietly and, taking Hersh Ostropoler the jester with them, went out into the night. Only the *Chasidim* who had come with Levi Yitzchak remained. One of them, a stocky man with a kind round face approached me.

"My name is Berl. Sleep now. We set out at dawn."

"How do you know," I asked, "that the Rabbi desires me to accompany him and you?"

"Because on our way here," Berl said, "he told us that there were many in Israel who had contemplated apostasy and many who had wandered on far and strange ways. But there were always some among them who sought the company of the sages and who became saints and leaders of the righteous. And he foretold that we would meet such an one today and in this place."

Aaron had brought in sacks of straw for the rabbi and his followers to lie on. I went to my upper chamber in the inn and fell asleep with more peace and less pain at heart than I had known for years. Not long after dawn the man named Berl knocked at my door. I came down and the Rabbi Levi Yitzchak led the great morning prayer. His voice and words were not like those of a man who repeats, however devoutly, a thing repeated by many generations of many men in many places. These words were being born out of his soul upon his lips at the break of this day. And his followers sang and spoke with him, lost to the body in this hour, to private being and to private care, ardent as flames that burned into the very heart of heaven.

They ceased, and I ceased too who had falteringly sung and chanted with them. Their faces shone with a

light from within. And now Berl led us all to a stream in the woods not far from here and all, led by the Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, bathed in the chill bright waters of the stream. We returned for a little to the inn and ate a light meal. I paid my reckoning to Aaron and his wife Esther. I offered to pay for the rabbi and his companions. But both man and wife said that neither of them would barter any of their portion, small enough doubtless, of the *'Olam Habba*, the world to come, by taking money either from or for their rabbi and his *Chasidim*.

So we set out, I no doubt in my Western garb and cloak an odd enough fellow traveler of this company. The air was sharp and pleasant; the woods were nearly brown. It was evident that autumn came early here in Poland. The rabbi was silent this morning. But the good simple faithful Berl walked beside me. He told me that these wayfarings were habitual with Levi Yitzchak. He being the rabbi's secretary always accompanied him. Towns grew hot and close over the master's head; he feared that the poor and broken in spirit who needed him most did not come to his study. So he wandered forth to become united with the *Shechinah*, the exiled Divine Abiding, and also to persuade men to set their feet upon the way of life. He was never formal or precise or clerical or preoccupied. Even in his prayer shawl and phylacteries, he would talk to men and women, adapting his speech to their simplicity.

Often on these journeyings, Berl told me, Levi Yitzchak would meet the *maggidim*, the itinerant preachers of whom his opinion was small because they were severe on the people, being men no less sinful themselves, chiding the people in unmeasured terms. Once he said to such a *maggid*, a man of vain and bitter countenance:

"The Jews are a holy people. Even if they do not fulfill God's will, nor wholly obey his commandments, yet are they a good people. For those other peoples dwell on their own earth and are masters there, while we are scattered over all the world and persecuted and homeless." The *maggid* promised to speak mildly and consolingly but related that he was about to marry off his daughter and needed gifts and fees for her dowry. Quietly the master slipped into the synagogue where the *maggid* was speaking. The man was false to his promise. In the hope of gain he frightened the people and made them weep and tremble. When he had finished our rabbi arose and prayed in a quiet penetrating voice: "King of the universe, believe him not! Believe him not! Thy people is not so wicked! He preaches thus because he has a daughter to marry off and needs money for the girl's dowry." . . .

Except for brief rests under trees and by streams we walked the greater part of that day. Berl told me that on the way home the rabbi did not loiter and seek out people as he did when setting forth after many weeks in the heaviness of towns. Soon after the noon hour, at which we had rested briefly but not eaten and only drunk a little water, I was walking next to Levi Isaac and could not refrain from asking him how it came about that we were not wearier and hungrier. He gave me a sharp sudden luminous look: "It is written: He forms the light and creates the darkness. Not 'formed the light and created the darkness.' At every moment He creates life and infuses it into His creatures."

In the afternoon we came to a town where dwelled a rich man, one who leased a whole forest from a noble and caused the logs to be floated down the Vistula and

sold to the Prussians. This man was a *Chasid* and, having heard of the approach of the rabbi, sent messengers to the edge of the town asking him and his companions to honor his house with their presence. Levi Yitzchak told the messenger that we would come. Then he turned to me and said: "In the defense of the children of Israel it is to be asserted as a matter of principle that they do not obey the entire will of their maker with faultless perseverance because of their poverty and bitter struggle for their daily bread." He saw the look of astonishment in my eyes at the formality of his speech. "I was composing a sermon for the New Year in my mind. There are several sermons already which I will cause to be printed. I would have men know that God, contrary to the assertions of the philosophers, dwells not in sublime withdrawal from this world, but that He provides for each of His creatures and at every moment sustains that creature's life."

It was a very handsome great house in which we were received. The owner of it, whose name was Saul and who had added to it the name of Wal, came forth to greet us and kissed the Rabbi Levi Yitzchak reverently. Saul Wal leased the forest domains from Prince Poninski, son-in-law of the Marshal of the realm Lubomirski. Berl told me that this Saul Wal spoke very elegant Polish and was highly respected by the nobles of the province and was a tireless intercessor for his people. He was now an elderly man who had become a *Chasid* long ago when the Rabbi Israel ben Elieser, the *Ba'al-shem-tob*, still trod the earth. This had never pleased his wife Braine, whom his later wealth had made vain and arrogant. It was she, too, who had furnished the house with these finely carved chests and embroidered chairs which had

been brought up the river from Danzig, and some of which had been bought at the famous fair of Leipzig in Saxony. Nor did we see Braine nor her daughters while we were at Saul Wal's house.

He led us all in and greeted each, asking me courteously but with a smile how I had fallen in with his revered rabbi. Stroking his beard he spoke to me in German. He knew Cerfberr by reputation and wondered what the proud "Daitsch," the Germans, would say of one of themselves wandering the Polish plains with one of those *Chasidic* rebbes whom the great Talmudists and "lights of the exile" were fighting and damning and threatening with both the lesser and the greater ban of excommunication. He was even more astonished when I told him that I was originally of Avignon and long ago of those who had been driven forth from Spain. He placed me at his left hand, having bidden the rabbi to sit at his right when, after prayer and ablution, we gathered around the great board in the long dining room of his house.

Levi Yitzchak was in a more placid mood than I had yet seen him. Before pronouncing the blessings over the food and wine that already loaded the oaken table, he said: "Because God who is One has created us, and because Israel is one community and all its members of one origin, therefore each of us feels the pain of every other, even as a body feels the pain of every limb or member. But equally so—" he inclined his head toward Saul Wal—"the joy of every Israelite is felt by every other."

The face of Saul Wal grew melancholy. Then he smiled. But his smile was devoid of mirth.

"Joy, Rebbe? Joy? You are a *Zaddik*, a wholly righteous man. But you are young and dwell with the *Shechinah* and bring men into the light of the Divine Presence. I,

on the other hand, live amid heat and conflict. No day passes but that Jews come to me with tales of cruelty and wrong and oppression. I order my coach and fare forth. I bow down to the *voyvoda* of the province; I wait in the anti-chambers of the *panovie*. 'Aha,' says the *Pan*, if he is well-humored, 'here is Saul Wal. For a Jew you are a decent fellow and rich as Croesus to boot. What do you want again? Intercede for Shloime, the distiller? Mary, Mother of God, why don't you Jews end your misery and come into the Church! The price of swine's flesh would rise, but that is a small matter.' I sit with a subtle and complaisant smile until he is ready to be serious and hear about Shloime, a Jew, a man, a human soul, driven to utter despair for no fault, no dishonor, no sin. Joy, Rebbe? I am tired. I am very tired. A hundred times I am minded to sell all I have and go to the land of Israel and end my days in peace. But I have a wife; I have daughters; there are Jews who need help. Do you give my soul a little strength and a little joy and a little courage to go on!"

The Rabbi Levi Yitzchak began with blazing eyes to pronounce the blessings over meat and drink. Suddenly he interrupted himself. He rose to his feet and stretched his arms out wide.

Tears rolled down his soft brown silky beard, and in a loud desperate voice he cried: "King of the universe. If the phylacteries fall by accident from a Jew's head he is frightened and bends to the earth and lifts them up and kisses them reverently. King of the universe, Thy *tefillin*, Thy phylacteries, are the children of Israel. For two thousand years they have been lying in the dust of earth. When wilt Thou lift them up? When wilt Thou lift them up?"

Chapter Three

IT WAS soon after a dim autumnal dawn that we set out again. We had now a great tract of forest to traverse and these vast Polish forests, as Berl told me, were places dreary and ominous enough. But Levi Isaac trod them with his followers calmly, without haste or fear, confident in God's protection. Yet I could hear from Berl's voice and gather from his words that he himself had little stomach for this part of the journey.

"Mark you," he said, "there is next to no law in Poland. The great nobles live at strife with each other; there are those who chaffer with the Prussians and those who are in league with the Muscovites. Each family wants its power to be dominant. Meanwhile, there is neither decree nor order; none hews a clearing or builds a road; bears and wild boars and, what is worse, robbers infest the forests of these plains and no one knows what dealings the nobles have with the robbers. Peasants and Jews are pawns in a game of power."

We were entering deeper and deeper into the forest. The path was narrow and slippery. The grey clouds hung low, almost as though they touched the tops of the trees. Ghostlike, the white birches stood on either side

of the circuitous path. But sturdily onward strode our rabbi and his followers, and from time to time there sounded above the sharp rustling of the trees and the small roar of many forest waters the clear spontaneous music of their voices:

“Zion, Zion, how fair, how fair art thou,
Exile, exile, how bitter long art thou!
If thou, O exile, wert not so long,
In Zion, in Zion I would sing my song!”

Berl did not join in the singing. He glanced behind him from time to time; he peered into the underbrush. He told me softly that he had been child and boy in these forests and that he thought he saw signs of a stream of wild huntsmen having passed here not long before.

“Where do we stop and rest, if indeed we do?” I asked.

“There is a rude inn kept not, as is the wont hereabouts, by a Jewish lessor but by a Cossack from the Ukraine by the name of Olenko. We have brought eggs and bread for that reason from the house of Saul Wal, for at Olenko’s inn the food is unclean.”

“You have lain at that inn before?” I asked.

He nodded. “And do not think that I have no faith in our rabbi or his holiness. I have asked him whether it were not well for one of us to have a weapon, if only against the beasts of the forest. He chid me sternly for want of faith in the Eternal. Yet I am glad today that in western fashion you wear a sword.”

I laughed, for indeed my small side-arm was meant more for show than use. Yet gradually his uneasiness infected me, as it were, and I moved my sword up and down in its scabbard to see if it were ready for use.

All was silence now except for the forest noises and the soft thud of our footsteps. Levi Yitzchak walked with head slightly thrown back. He seemed to need no eyes to guide his steps. He was in one of his ecstatic moods, in which his body knew no faltering and no weariness. His followers, except Berl, shared that mood. Deeper and deeper they strode into the forest. But upon me fell a great homesickness. This was not my land. I wondered suddenly how I had come here, well as my mind knew. I saw blue skies and cypresses and sun-burnt walls and a face—oh, dearest and most luminous face in all the world—and brightness and glow of vineyards on hillsides. I was tempted to walk forward and speak to Levi Yitzchak and bare my heart to him when Berl grasped my arm.

"I am certain now that a rout of hunters passed here before us."

"Who would be hunting here?"

"One of the *panovie* and his men."

I remembered my grandfather's story of the father of Valenti Potocki. "Are they as wild and ribald as a generation ago?"

As though to answer him we heard a far sound of raucous singing carried to us by the sharp wind.

Berl was pale. "At the next bend of the road but one stands the inn of Olenko. They are there."

"Then, if you anticipate danger, why do we not stop, or even return to the house of Saul Wal?"

He shook his head.

"To the rebbe that would be a lack of faith. He walks through the fires of the world and they do not burn him."

I hastened forward to Levi Yitzchak's side. He was

walking as one does who walks in sleep. I knew that his soul had achieved that last concentration by virtue of which it pierced the mere vestiture of earth and found the reality of God. I was afraid that if I so much as plucked his sleeve, I would be committing a sacrilege. Something of his faith seemed to pass into me, though even at that moment the raucous singing suddenly grew in volume as the narrow path gave a sharp turn and in a small clearing appeared the half-ruined wooden inn of Olenko.

Now Berl hastened forward and did, indeed, lay his hand on the rabbi's arm. The *Chasidim* stopped like men awakening. But Levi Yitzchak smiled.

"It is written," he said, "that the thought of a sin is more to be feared than the sin itself. Shall we create danger by imagining it? Let us do as we have always done."

His followers closed in about him. Berl, all the braver for the fear he was mastering, strode on ahead. We crossed the small forest clearing and entered the parlor of the inn.

The hoarse voices fell silent as we crossed the threshold, nearly stumbling over the huge blood-clotted carcass of a wild boar. In the beast's belly quivered the fatal spear, and its dead eyes looked monstrous and yet pitiful. The dim room was dark with fumes from the chimney. Our eyes stung. Suddenly someone thrust open a window, and at the same moment a pewter mug flew across our heads, and a screeching guffawing laughter arose. We stood still. At the head of the huge table, clad in magnificent green hunter's apparel, sat the *Pan*. 'Twas he who had thrown the pewter mug. But he, we could see, had meant no harm. His eyes were glazed with drink.

He knew not whom he saw. He rose for a moment and laughed emptily and then fell back upon his chair and slid thence to the floor and slept.

One of the huntsmen sprang up with a wild shriek. "Jews! Jews!"

Five others were there who echoed the cry of the first. They bent themselves over with laughter. They held their bellies.

"Jews! Jews!"

A small, thin man in a long leathern apron, the keeper of the inn Olenko, tripped hurriedly from one to the other, trying to persuade them to sit down again. That seemed to change their mood. Fury took the place of mirth. With a roar they came toward us. We stood our ground. The *Chasidim* were no weaklings. But, crushed between two of the tall huntsmen of the Pan, I suddenly saw a third's huge red hand filled with our rabbi's silken brown beard and about to drag down that beautiful and sacred head. Blistering tears stung my eyes. I wrenched myself loose and, ere I knew, had plunged my side-arm into the fellow's belly. He fell. Levi Yitzchak, released and pale, held up his hands as though to beg us not to resist. But the fray was on. The men were maddened by the sight of their wounded fellow. Berl thrust the rabbi behind us. We fought staunchly and well, though it was strange enough to see the long *caftans* of the *Chasidim* flying, and I myself, though furious and bleeding, was cold at heart and terrified at the thought that I, perhaps, no matter under what provocation, had killed a fellow man. Then a horn was sounded at the window, a hunting horn with a sharp quick blast, and others of the Pan's men stormed into the room and fell upon us and crushed us by the sheer weight of many and yelled for ropes and

tied our arms and legs and threw us on the wooden planks of the flooring. I looked about. There was no sign of the rabbi or of Berl. I saw the white face of Olenko. Awkwardly, he pressed his back against a small side-door. His eyes met mine. A strange understanding was in the glance. I cared not for my wounds now. I praised the Eternal in my heart. Levi Yitzchak was safe.

There was a sullenness in the room now. Three men bent over their fellow whom I had stabbed. The blood flowed in a thick narrow trickle from under him. Two others lifted up the *Pan* and dashed a little cold water into his face. They murmured and muttered and threw hateful glances at us who were bound and helpless. But I knew not the Polish tongue and did not understand the purport of their words. The *Pan* stood up uncertainly and opened his eyes and listened to what was said to him. Fingers were pointed at the wounded man and at me. The *Pan* came over to where I lay. He was a man of forty with a fine handsome countenance, coarsened by liquor. He spoke to me in a harsh voice. Knowing that most of the Polish nobles spoke French, I said in that language that I did not know Polish and that the blow I had struck was purely a defensive one.

He frowned. He put his hands against his head which doubtless throbbed in pain.

He answered in French. "I see no one hurt but my poor Tadeusz. Who the devil are you in any case? Not one of my Jews; not a Jew from hereabouts at all." Rage shook him suddenly. "I will not have my men murdered by scum from God knows where."

He turned and gave orders. The *Chasidim* were released and told to run. Mugs were thrown after them to speed their flight. They tried to turn back and catch

my eye. I knew their meaning. They would not forget my plight. When they were gone, the *Pan* ordered me to be raised up and fettered even more tightly. The thongs cut into me. They carried me out by the back door of the inn. There stood the horses. A huge man hoisted me across the pommel of a saddle upon which he then swung himself. The *Pan* on a great bay rode ahead of the cavalcade. The pommel dug itself cruelly into my side. The thongs grew sharper. I was nigh to fainting. The way became an eternity of pain—pain of the body, pain of the heart. Perhaps I was feverish. Life turned into a phantasmal horror. Was I the man who had held Marguerite in his arms? Was I the man who had gone forth to seek a better way for my people? Suddenly rage seized upon me, rage over the ignominy of my position. With all my strength I struggled, careless how the hempen thongs cut into me. One burst and the horse reared. The rider used his spurs and pointed a dagger at my throat. But I had got my right arm free and now drove my fist with all my might at the fierce, bearded and yet frightened face above me. Again the horse reared and the next thing I felt was my head crashing upon a stone. Then there was darkness.

I woke up in a prison—a small cell of rough stone with a thick door of oak. There was a narrow barred window through which I could look out. The scene was peaceful—a farmyard, with snorting ducks and a rude trough for them, and at the end a stable from which protruded slightly the gentle faces of cows. A huge manure heap stank against fencing at the right. I was dizzy with a deep ache in my head. But the fetters had been removed. I concluded that I was in no public prison but somewhere in the cellars of the *Pan's* manor house. This

thing was natural enough. For each of the great nobles seemed to be either a *starosta* or a *voyevoda*, as the Polish terms went; that is to say, an official having some sort of both administrative and judicial authority. Over the local Jews and peasants their authority was absolute—extending, as I had heard, to matters of life and death. Yet were these Jews and peasants—the thought came to me with a shudder—better off in such a plight than I. For they had friends and kinsmen here to protest and plead. I could rot in this prison; I could be silently done to death. There was one gleam of hope. Levi Yitzchak had escaped. To forget was not his way.

Dusk came and with it a rattling at my door. Bolts were pushed aside and the heavy door swung half open. One of the *Pan's* tall huntsmen came in with a half loaf of bread and a jug of water. He had been told that I had not the Polish tongue. So in spiteful pantomime he made it clear to me that Tadeusz had died. Then, laughing loudly, he went through an elaborate pantomime of my being hanged or beheaded, and ran out with evil laughter, and shot the bolts. And I could not but remember the ancient vaults I had once seen in Paris deep in the earth under the church of St. Julien le Pauvre, with that medieval scrawl upon the stone made by some poor devil centuries and centuries ago: "*Demain je serai pendu*—Tomorrow I shall be hanged!"

I arose and repeated the evening prayer. Guilt, however unwillingly incurred, was upon me. Not for me, not for us the knightly pagan sense of having slain in self-defense or in the defense of another, however dear and venerable! Perhaps that was a feeling not without right or good. But all anger was gone from me and I saw poor Tadeusz lying in the blood that I had spilt. Dread-

ful was the extremity to which I was reduced nevertheless; I ended my prayer not without tears. Deep in my heart I thanked the Holy One, blessed be He, for that I had known Marguerite and that she and I had loved each other, seeing that an end was coming upon me so soon.

Now the dark had fallen. I forced myself to eat a few mouthfuls of bread. As I set the jug of water to my lips I heard a sound like scratching at the stone coping outside of the window. I put my face close to the bars and listened.

A whisper came to me—the strong firm whisper of a Jew: “Don’t give up hope! Saul Wal knows. What do you need?”

A quick glow came to my heart. “Writing material. I would write to my father.”

“Later!” the answer came.

Then there was silence. But after an hour or two came the scratching again and through the bars of my window was thrust a small leafy branch of a tree and amid the leaves were tied paper and pens and a vial of ink and a thick short candle and a tinder-box. I thanked the bearer but he made no answer.

I lit the candle and wrote for an hour. Then, despite the hard stones for both couch and pillow, weariness got the better of me and I slept for a few hours. But soon after I had awakened the bolts clanked and my gaoler, the same fellow who had predicted my hanging, came in with a great cocked old duelling pistol. He put it against my back and motioned to me to march in front of him, and we walked through cellar after cellar and found the stairs and climbed them, and entered the beautiful chambers of the manor house, where we found the *Pan* amid his men in the banqueting hall full of the trophies

of the hunt—boars' heads and stags' heads in great numbers—and next to the *Pan*, standing there with a mingling of respectfulness and familiarity, I saw Saul Wal. But the *Pan*'s face was dark.

He shook his head and roared at me in French when I was brought face to face with him: "You would have been hanged at dawn had not that fool the Castellan Cieszkowski been named voyevoda and so given jurisdiction over Jews. But so sure as my name is Valenti Potocki you'll rot in prison unless you use a rope I'll send you!"

A strange stab went through my heart. "Does your Excellency know the story of that Valenti Potocki who became a Jew?" I asked.

He sprang up.

"You'll not bandy words with me! I had a particular affection for Tadeusz. Nothing but trouble and misery from the Jews! Aye, they seduced that simple-minded uncle of mine. A born fool he must have been. The story is an extra reason for hanging you. I'll do it, by God, I'll do it!"

He stopped exhausted. Saul Wal spoke to him with a gentle seriousness. He listened surlily and shook his head. Yet Wal continued with his soft insistence and at last he nodded.

Wal came over to me. "Is your father rich?"

"Yes."

"Ask for money in the letter you are writing. We will see to it that it goes swiftly by special couriers. It's your only chance and no very great one. We'll hope that he doesn't suddenly overcome his pride and turn you over to the voyevoda's court. Levi Yitzchak is praying for you. I'll send my man late tonight to fetch the letter."

"Money?" I asked. "Can he be bribed?"

Wal shook his head. "His wife, the *Pani* Potocki, has a strain of avarice."

With a swift glance at the *Pan* he took my hand.

"How much hope have I?" I asked. "It is better to know."

The *Pan's* voice rose before Wal could answer. It roared; it broke in his rage into falsetto. Saul Wal fled from me. Against the boundless rage in that voice there was nothing that would avail. The man grasped a hunting knife and flung it at me with great strength and skill. Only his quivering rage made it miss me. With a thud it hit the wall and trembled there. He waved his arms. Two of his men fell upon me, sweaty ill-smelling giants, and dragged me with many cuffs and kicks back to my prison. They opened the door and flung me in, and slammed the heavy door as with a clap of thunder.

Dazed I drew forth what I had written to my father in the night. Must I now add begging thereto? Of course I could give him an order on the considerable funds I had invested with Cerfberr in Strasbourg. But none of this money was liquid. My father was the only one who had always held it prudent to have a solid amount of gold in hand. No matter, no matter. I rebelled suddenly against laying any burden upon his quiet life, even in this extremity of mine. For it came over me that I had been but little comfort to him and, despising the experience of the ages, had acted like a born fool. For myself my folly had been triumph. For I had found Marguerite; I had found my star. And though all stars were in all likelihood setting for me, that one would burn above me when I came to die. But my father? He seemed most good and worthy to me in this hour, and I seemed to

myself an ungrateful lout to have left him lonely in his later years. Bruised, fevered and distraught I put a great deal of all these thoughts into the letter I now finished. Then weakness overwhelmed me and I half fainted on the chill stones of my prison.

A fever rose and fell in me. Perhaps it was from the turbid water which was all I had to drink; perhaps it was from the blows and bruises. Half somnolent, but not asleep, I was tormented by strange and fearful dreams. Mountain-bellied idiots, white, naked, clammy, crowded me; I walked through the noisome streets of a ruined city emptied of its people and yet, amid the utter solitariness, demoniacal voices shrilled behind me. I roused myself and, with a strange dread, found my cheeks wet with tears. I moaned the name most dear to me in the world and then sank back into my fevered drowsing.

A man brought me fresh bread and water and kicked me in the side to wake me. Dusk came again and night and late, I know not at what hour, the tapping came at my window, the same tapping that had come the night before, and I forced myself to arise. I stood on the tips of my toes and gave the emissary whom I could not see the letter I had written to my father and he, the emissary of Saul Wal, once more thrust through the bars a long stick this time to which were tied two small bundles. These I took and sought to speak to the man. But already I heard his soft receding footfalls. Then I looked at the bundles, and one was a pot of beans cooked as our people cooked them in this land, and the other was a flask of brandy. I could eat but a few mouthfuls of the food. I have always believed, however, that the brandy saved my life. I hoarded it, drinking but a few swallows at a time. But that little soothed and healed me.

Yet now came days of utter dread and utter horror such as no human being should be made to bear. There was the solitariness; there was the silence; there was the physical torture of that bleak stony cell; there was the uncertainty of fate, of life or of death; there was the cancerous knowledge of the wild, phantasmal injustice and unreason of this whole thing. And that last torture was the worst and had the most poisonous fang. For that fang struck not only into the individual heart; it struck into faith and into reason and into the nature of the universe and poisoned one's faith in the justice and even in the mercy of the Holy One, blessed be He. And I think that I was sustained during these evil days only by the thought of all the many good and innocent—better and more innocent than I, and especially from among my people—who had suffered after this manner and of those who would suffer after this dreadful manner in years and ages yet to come.

Chapter Four

I SAW no one but my gaoler. He was a powerful man no longer young, with high cheek bones and peering eyes and very long moustaches which he stroked with pride. When he brought me my bread and water I saw that he would have been inclined to linger and gossip or even jeer. But he knew I had not the Polish tongue. So he and I, as it were, watched each other. There came no more tapping at the window, which I held a thing of evil omen. So I had no way of getting any message concerning my fate but from the face and expression of this fellow. For many days it was without grimness; there was even now and then a twinkle in those peering eyes. Then, coming and going at first, there was a gleam of cruelty. And over the cold cruelty he laughed. And he spoke. He knew it was useless but he could not contain himself. But I heard the word "voyevoda" and feared that either I was to be turned over to that official or else that his opinion on the case had been sought. And it was strange how I had to dig my nails into my palms not to follow his foolish example and also speak and ask in vain. Once, persuading myself of the possibility of his understanding, I spoke a few words in German. Of course he only guffawed at the unfamiliar sounds.

I know not how many days this situation lasted or how soon it was when the gleam of cruelty in the man's eyes deepened. He laughed an ugly laugh and his moustaches seemed to rise like those of a cat or tiger, and he slid the edge of his hand across his own throat in man's old, old gesture of the threat of beheading, whether by rope or axe. And I grew cold all over and wondered to my own horror-stricken astonishment how it had ever been possible for one human being to cleave the head from the body of a fellow man without the instant overwhelming dread that the same unspeakable fate would be his own. But after that first shock of horror I determined in my inmost depth to bear my miserable fate with all the gallantry and dignity I could summon, even as the innumerable martyrs of our people had done in ages past.

'Tis true that this determination was no easy one to sustain at all hours of the long, barren days and nights. Moreover, it seemed to me that twice or thrice on moonless nights I heard whisperings and scratchings outside my window but could establish no communication with any, were he friend or foe, who was there. My prison was, indeed, no very formidable one. A powerful file could have severed those bars. But Jews are people who do not so much as think of violence or of taking violent measures even in their own defense. Saul Wal's persuasiveness and Levi Yitzchak's prayers were all I had to count upon, and I found myself, may I be forgiven therefor, smiling grimly enough at this reflection.

About seven days from the day when my gaoler had first made that murderous gesture he came in with moustaches more bristling than ever and his lips curled back from his powerful teeth. He brought forward his right

hand which he had been holding behind his back and hurled down upon the stony floor a hempen rope. Then he threw back his head and bellowed with laughter. I felt with shame a tremor go through my limbs; next I determined not to add the sin of self-slaughter to my others; finally I thought that at least not yet was there nail or bar in my prison from which a man could hang himself. At all events if they wanted to kill me, they must do so themselves, and not without amazement I felt myself growing taut and determined to offer what resistance I could.

The fellow left me. And now my torment was great. For I was very tense not knowing at what hour of day or night my executioners would come. And it seemed to me also that there was much nocturnal stirring and tramping in the court on which my barred window gave. But the nights were still black and I had no way of knowing what caused those stirrings and trampings. And so it happened that I had less rest than ever by day or by night and often thought that I would go quite mad. I knew not even whether the letter to my father had been despatched; I had almost lost count of the days that I had been here, though they were many; I did, indeed, reach during these days a very extremity of misery. At last death came to seem preferable to life, and a dark cloud settled upon my spirit.

There came a morning when my gaoler did not appear with the customary bread and water. But I had sunk into a lethargy after a wakeful night of terror, and cared not. I saw from the light that came in at the window that the sun was riding on toward the noonday center of the heavens, and at the same time heard a clicking and tapping of many heavy boots along the corridor which led

to my prison. I sprang up; I held myself erect. If the fatal hour had come, I would meet it bravely and with the declaration of the Unity of the Eternal upon my lips. The door flew open. Dizzily, I saw not my gaoler but an elderly man with a peaked beard and a strong chain with many keys dangling there from across his breast. A kind of major-domo.

He raised a thin hand and said in muffled French: "*Suivez moi—follow me!*"

And now I found that my unaccustomed legs would hardly carry me forward and that my eyes were dazzled by the full light of day that came streaming down the stairs up which I followed my guide. My heart pounded in my very throat; I trembled; I stumbled over the threshold of the great dazzling hall with the many hunting trophies. There stood Potocki, frowning, yet with a forced smile on his lips. And next to him stood a woman. She turned. I cried out with the cry of a child, and stumbled toward her and knelt before her—before Marguerite—and hid my face in her hands that were already hollowed to receive it. She bent over me and touched my hair with her lips.

I heard the voice of Potocki.

"It would have been well, Monsieur de Vidal, if you had told me you were a friend of the Comte de Saint-Florentin whom I have met at the court of Stanislaus Lesczynski. Though he is only titular king of Poland, he is a revered friend of mine. Then it would not have been necessary for Madame la Comtesse to have hastened to Nancy to his Royal Highness, nor for him to have sent his plea for you to the Princess Lubomirska. But I found you in company—*éh bien*—what did you expect? I am no special enemy of the Jews. But your alliance with

them astonishes me! Perhaps you are thinking of following the example of that foolish and blasphemous uncle of mine."

Lightly Marguerite laid her hand on my lips. With the other she motioned to me to rise. I did so. I faced her. I could not speak. Not yet. I could only gaze upon her.

Again Potocki spoke. "My major-domo will provide you with fresh garments and all things necessary. Since Madame la Comtesse has her own coach, she will perhaps excuse me. I have urgent affairs to attend to."

His voice was bitter. He bowed to Marguerite and strode stiffly out of the room.

I still trembled. But her warm hand was in mine and I could stammer her name. She looked about to make sure that the room was empty.

"It is as Potocki said, except for one circumstance. Poor Gaston is dead. But I dared not say that. I said he was ill. He wrote many verses to the titular King of Poland, the Duc of Lorraine and Bar and flattered the man because he is Louis Bourbon's father-in-law. He had these verses printed with his others. So I went to Nancy and threw myself at Stanislaus Lesczynski's feet and begged him to intercede for you, Gaston's friend and benefactor. He sent me to the wife of the Marshal of the realm of Poland, the Princess Lubomirska, who is a truly good and generous-hearted woman. From her I hastened here."

At last I could stammer, "How did you know of my plight? How did you know?"

"From your father. Your friends here sent your letter to him by special couriers who changed horses every few hours and rode day and night. And at once your father

bought me the coach that is without. The postilion is a trustworthy man and the groom one of our people—”

“Marguerite!”

I had only that cry. But in that cry was a whole life’s fulfillment and redemption.

Her blue eyes filled with tears.

“Grandfather told me and taught me to say to you: *Ki azzah ka-mavet ahabah*—for strong as death is love.”

“Is it not strange that you should tell me this, my beloved, in the house of a kinsman of that Potocki who became the righteous proselyte? Is it not strange?”

“Is it not fitting? But you must tell me now what we are to do and how we are to be guided.” She smiled at the wonder in my face. “For it is not fitting that a young widow career half over Europe in a coach with a strange young man, is it? But I will not trap you. If you don’t want to marry me—”

I had never before heard laughter so happy from her.

“If I dare to understand you, one of the holiest men in the world will marry us, the Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. If I could send a messenger to a certain Saul Wal who dwells nearby . . .”

“The lady of the house, the *Pani* Potocki, told me to use house and servants as I needed them.”

She pulled at the velvet bell-pull. The elderly major-domo appeared. We explained our needs to him. He promised to despatch a messenger to Saul Wal; he led us to the apartments of the *Pan* and the *Pani*, where we were to prepare ourselves for our departure.

An hour later we met again in the great hall, clad in fresh garments, Marguerite like a rose with slightly opened petals turning to the sun of spring, I still weak

and tremulous and, as she said, pitifully pale, but at least shaved and in unstained garments.

Saul Wal was waiting for us.

"I have heard the tale," he said, "at least rumours of it. A great honor will befall me, Reb Vidal, if the lady and you will come to my house."

"And the Rebbe Levi Yitzchak?" I asked. "We have need of him."

"He is near by. He has not left. He has wrestled in prayer with the Holy One, blessed be He, for your redemption."

I explained what had been said to Marguerite. We descended and I was happy to see the fine traveling coach with postilion and groom which my good father had provided for Marguerite, and we drove to the house of Saul Wal. And it amused me now to see Saul's wife Braine and their two daughters in French finery ready to receive us. This was their high moment. A great lady of France was to be their guest. They would talk of it the rest of their lives. Yet was there sadness under my amusement. For they were, as I knew, a little ashamed of Saul Wal's being a follower of the Master of the Good Name and of Levi Yitzchak. A little wealth, a small share in the light of the world's peoples—and already the foolish among us were ripe to betray Israel. I watched Marguerite. She was most courteous but remained grave. Was she aware of what prompted these preening women?

They led us to a pleasant room in Saul Wal's fine house where cold meats and cakes and wine were served on a small table, and curtsied a little awkwardly and left us. And Marguerite laughed at my sudden hunger and yet almost wept too, for she knew what cruel privations I had suffered. We sat side by side on one of

Braine's French sofas; we sat hand in hand. We could not bear not to touch each other and our very souls flowed into each other through our touching hands. For a while we wanted no more. Was not her being here more eloquent than any words? Our hands and, through our hands, our hearts spoke for us. We who, by the strangest of fates, had always been one felt that deep oneness coursing in the very current of our blood again. But gradually speech came too.

"You never gave me up in your heart, did you?" she asked.

"Never for a breath, never for the twinkling of an eye. But the whole world, including what I could not but take to be your heritage of hate, rolled like a dark ocean between us."

She bowed her head a little. "There are other darknesses. In one of those darknesses I was left when you rode away from Dieu-le-fit. And this darkness was not only the ache of the forlornness of love, though it was that also. Men and women who love each other have been separated before and have suffered great anguish. But there remained to them friends and faith, parents and kinsmen; there remained to them the world in which they stood. To me there remained nothing. Knowing you had changed something in me, had changed my inmost self. So I was left with nothing for myself—nothing. Oh, I did not know this on that day nor on the next. I had to listen to my soul and learn its teaching slowly. I only knew the darkness that it was black and the silence in my heart that it was like the silence of the grave.

"You remember that house and the two others who were in it—that house in Dieu-le-fit in which the very

sunshine died? Gaston and Lisette, more like conspirators than ever, would always be whispering together. They started and drew apart when, after a white sleepless night, you being now gone, I walked past them on my way out to the kindly woods under the wide sky. For I thought that it would heal me to go out to that ruined tower, to that hunting lodge where you and I had spent so many hours. But even as I was running down the slope of the plateau, a cold blast seemed to blow upon my very heart and my limbs seemed to falter and I knew on the instant that I could not go there, to that scene where I had been so happy—more deeply happy than even I had known—now that that happiness was forever gone and could not be brought back. I stopped and stood there and stood very still and I said to myself: "Though my voice could reach the very sky, it would avail me not."

She looked up. I clasped her hands more closely.

"I know," I cried. "You want to shake the very pillars of the world."

"Yes," she went on. "And nothing happens. And so you begin to die a little inside of you or, at least, you seem to die. And you begin to have little care concerning anything that might happen."

"When I came back, Gaston and Lisette were again standing carefully apart. They treated me with great courtesy, as Lisette had scarce ever done and Gaston not for a long time. I began to wonder dimly why and I laughed, I confess, a harsh little laugh at the thought that it was because of your action in making me the owner of the house and of the farms. When they heard my laugh they were startled and offered me wine and, naturally, I refused it. I had looked your deed of gift

into my old empty jewel case. I had not wholly understood its meaning at once, nor cared greatly about that meaning.

"Now the days went by very quietly, although soon enough Gaston and Lisette began to bicker again. Soon, too, Lisette began to jeer at me again. But I, in truth, barely heard the sound of the speaking of those two; the words entered my ears but neither my understanding nor my heart. I spent most of my hours alone. And many of these lonely hours I began gradually to pass in the church of the village. It was a much larger church than the village needed in this age; it had been built centuries ago and had very thick stone walls supported by two massive buttresses. The long high nave was cool and very still and utterly empty. The peasants were not devout and, but for a few old people at a mass or two on Sunday, none entered the church. It was filled with a faint musty odor, over which floated early in each week whiffs of the incense burned in the censer on Sunday. I would kneel in a dim corner not far from the marble baptismal font. I never greatly heeded the altar, lightless but for the faint gleam of the small perpetual lamp; I scarcely glanced at the small paintings around the walls which depicted the Stations of the Cross. Oh, it was not that I did not remember what the ladies of the Sacred Heart had taught me in that one year so long ago in which I was taught by them. But, do you know, those teachings never penetrated my heart. And then, after my marriage to Gaston, I never met anyone who did not feign to be a philosopher. They were all godless and they jeered at the Church and its faith. And yet I continued to visit the cool still nave of the church, and one day I discovered a very strange reason for it. And it was

this: that here, in the church, I felt less lonely and felt closest to you."

She was silent for a moment, as though reflecting on this strange circumstance, and so I put to her the question which naturally burned at my heart: "How could that be now that you knew that I was a Jew? Did it make no difference to you?"

"I always knew that you were very strangely different from my father and from my brothers and from Gaston and from all of his friends. When Lisette first cried out that word it meant nothing to me except abuse and contemptuousness on the lips of that wicked and angry woman. Then I began to ponder on the few vague things that I had ever heard about Jews. You were none of those things; none of those things had ought to do with you. And then I remembered—do you?—how once you had defended the Jewish people, and I could not but remember that all your words had been good and kind and reasonable words. And so it came about that the word Jew ceased to have any meaning for me, except that it meant you and that I still felt closest to you and to all your well-remembered words and to your tenderness and goodness there in the very nave of that village church. And I really needed this feeling in order to sustain a little my very life.

"For now it seemed to me, now that you were gone, that I had been myself, a self I could really understand, only with you. I could hardly imagine those rude wild years of my girlhood in Auvergne, save for the sweet old poems which also I had spoken of to none but you; and it was very hard for me to recall the girl who had consented almost gladly to marry the Comte de Saint-Florentin and who had not been without avidity for the glit-

ter of the world. I had no friends and no comforters but my memories of you. I had felt tranquil and trustful and at home with you, and happy even in the hours when you and I had been saddest, and a thousand times and with tears I recollected how I had lain down on the cushions we brought to our hunting lodge and had slept there with my head against your knee, a sleep like the sleep of childhood. And I was sure now that I had had that feeling about no other human being all my life except my mother who had died so early.

"Now it happened that a peasant who leased one of the Saint-Florentin farms noticed my visits to the church and gossiped about them. Lisette laughed at me.

" 'You are young, Madame, to turn devout. That I thought was left for those who could no longer enjoy the pleasures of life. And now you are a woman of property and could turn Gaston and me out and sell house and land and go back to Paris and find yourself a sweeter-scented lover than the last!'

"At this Gaston grew somber as a winter sky.

" 'Be silent! Why should we not seek comfort from above? Is there so much to be had on earth? Are you so happy?'

"Lisette laughed her falsely trilling, bitter laugh.

" 'Ah, I could have been happy enough with my youth and my beauty, my charm and my wealth except for the ingratitude of men. Moncrif was a fool but also a monster of jealousy. But at least I never loved him as I did you, Gaston, who have been my undoing! You, you, you!'

Marguerite sighed.

"The woman lashed herself into a mad rage with her own words and fell from that into another and filled

the house with the hideous clamor of her accusations against God and man, never for a moment suspecting that any fault could have lain with her. And in these rages which went on, day in and day out, she tried to flay the very soul of Gaston. And so it came about that I felt a sorrow for him which eased a little my own loneliness and my own grief. He was nothing to me and had, in very truth, never been. He had bought me who was young and helpless and confused for a price he had not even paid. But now I saw him as just a poor, sick, stricken man, older than his years which were not few, hounded by this fury in a small earthly purgatory. He had been very vain and very sensual. But all the while he had tried to aspire toward what seemed to him things wise and high. He had not really meant to be cruel. And now, at least, he saw the vanity and emptiness of his life and sought not to justify it, and it irked me that this scorpion should sting him by day and by night. You are not angry with me, are you?"

I shook my head and clasped her hands the more tightly.

"So I began in small ways to minister to him, playing at cards with him, reading to him, seeing to it that his candles were lit and his nightly draught of spiced wine steaming-hot as he liked to have it. Doing these things, I had the strange conviction, which now I know to have been true, that this is what then and there you would have had me do. Gaston looked at me with grateful eyes, not so much for the small services as for the existence of any good and any unselfishness in his world, and he doubted not but that I had received this impulse from the image of the Virgin in the village church. But this kindly drawing closer together of Gaston and my-

self led to the end of the life of us three in that strange house. For it was a thing that Lisette could not brook. Her scorpion sting was a little blunted, and so the violence of her rages but increased. She rushed madly out of the house and sent a peasant boy back to announce that Madame de Moncrif was drowning herself. But his grinning and twitching and his hand clutching a piece of silver betrayed her foolish plan. She came back spattered and with soaked hair but dry feet. She pierced the air with her cries. None cared whether she lived or died. She had been robbed and degraded, and was now being murdered. She tore her upper garment with her small, stubby, cruel hands and clawed at it till the shreds hissed and she was naked to the waist. Since none answered her ravings, she grasped a heavy candelabrum of pewter and took it by the empty candle socket and hurled it with wild strength across the room. It struck Gaston squarely in the left temple. His heavy, flaccid face turned a violent purple. Limply his huge body slid to the floor. I knew that he was dead.

"The woman Lisette was calm on the instant. She took a heavy cloth from the table and covered her nakedness.

" 'So this is over, Madame,' she said. 'I stayed here but for a little revenge. Soon I would have gone whatever the event. For I am not the pauper you think me and not the fool. I have both jewels and gold; I spent neither the money Gaston gave me nor pawned the jewels. I shall send for a coach. Perhaps I shall end by prowling about the gardens of the Tuileries at dusk. 'Tis more amusing than this. As for your company alone! *Ou la-la!* You are dull, Madame, and stupid.'

"I, too, was cold. I asked her if she would send the

surgeon barber and the priest from the village. Quite cheerfully she consented. She told the peasant lad who was still in the kitchen to fetch a farmer's wagon to take her first to Dieu-le-fit and next to Montélimar, where she could hire her a coach. Next she clattered up the stairs to make ready her belongings.

"Our old serving-woman, who was strong, helped me to lift the body of Gaston upon a bed. There were two or three days of turmoil. Then he was laid to the rest he needed in the graveyard of the village. I was alone.

"And now I must tell you of what happened to me next. I had never before been unaccompanied in a house and yet I discovered that except for you I had never before been less solitary. For now I was free to be with my own thoughts and now I could dwell wholly with my memories of you who were the only one, of all the people in the world, who had seemed to belong to me and to whom I also seemed to belong. I knew now that all the other men and women in my life had been strangers to me. I hated no one, no one at all, not even Gaston. But the words of all these people had been a harsh and empty clamor in my ears; their touch had been a violation; their ways had not been my ways nor their thoughts my thoughts. They and I had dwelt side by side but no one had known any deep or true thing concerning the other. And so I was really less unhappy than I had been through so many weary noisy months and sat very still in an upper chamber of the house, sat there hour after hour and let the thought of you and the thought of the meaning of life to me float into my mind and softly eddy there. The silence and the aloneness were very healing. I said to myself that it was better to be solitary than to be with any but one's true love, whoever that true love

was; but that the loneliness of life was so great that one should seek out one's true love, if one had found one, and be with him and serve him.

"And so I loitered and dreamed and yet could make no plans. Then, one fine day, a peasant named Grossetête who leased one of the Saint-Florentin farms, the largest and most fertile of them, came to me and asked whether I would be inclined to sell him the farm which he and his father before him had leased. The grape in the vineyards had been heavy and well-flavored for years. He and his family had lived sparingly and worked hard. Grossetête stood before me with his cap under his arm and scraped with his foot like a horse, which was his notion of politeness and said: "There are now twenty thousand livres in the iron-bound chest under my bed. If Madame la Comtesse will sell me the farm for that sum, I shall pay the small matter of the fees of Maître Poussin."

"And oh, even while the peasant was speaking, a conflagration spread in my breast! Now I knew that I had never given up the hope of seeing you again. I knew very well that you could not come to me. And so I knew that now I would go to you; yes, I would go among your people and seek you out. 'Twas not so hard. Many, many months ago I had put together the pieces, as it were, of a puzzle and had remembered that grave, tersely speaking but just and honest man in the Jew's street of Paris to whom I had sold the pearls and the diamonds. I could still see so clearly in memory that rout at Choiseul and the tall, scarlet-cloaked, scarlet-capped figure of His Eminence, the Papal Treasurer of Avignon. I saw the heavy glittering cross upon his breast as he said with a sardonic smile to a very great lady, one of the greatest

in the kingdom: 'Oh, yes, there is a very honest man named Mordecai Vidal in the *juiverie*. If you must have traffic with money-lenders, an unsavory crew, go to him.'

"And so it came to pass that in the company of Grosse-tête I went to the house of that Maître Poussin in Dieulefit. And do you know what he did? He chattered to me of you. He told me how you had bidden him draw the deed soundly so that no harm could come to me. This chatter of Poussin made me feel safe and warm and brave. I signed the deed of sale and received the money, which seemed a very great sum to me indeed, and closed the house and hired a coach at Montélimar and, taking with me the honest old woman who had been in my service for a long time, set boldly out for Paris."

Chapter Five

SHE fell silent and turned fully to me and stretched out her arms. Tightly, tightly we two lonely ones held each other. Perhaps all human beings are not so greatly in need of love as we were and had ever been; or, perhaps, never finding their true love, they know not what the lifting of the burden of loneliness from them can be. We knew and our souls were completed.

We heard a breathing and a rustling. In the door stood Braine in a gown of russet taffeta and curtsied and blushed. I arose and bade her come nearer.

She smiled and tittered now: "The Rabbi Levi Yitzchak sent a message by one of his followers. He will be here straight after morning prayers tomorrow." She tittered again. "We have sent for the marriage-canopy. It will be in this house later today. The rabbi says the bride is to dip in the Mikvah, the ritual bath, today. Perhaps this is a good time. Afterwards we can eat. Perhaps I may have the honor of accompanying her ladyship. The old woman who has charge of the Mikvah is but a rude simple old woman."

I think I blushed now. Marguerite said that of course she knew it was necessary that a woman about to be

married enter the ritual bath. And so she arose too now, and smiled at me and put her arm through Braine's arm and went with her.

Saul Wal came in to bear me company. He had a decanter of brandy and two small glasses which he filled.

"To a good life and to peace!" he said, lifting his own and pledging me. "This is a great occasion. May you two have beautiful children. Remember that David the King was a descendant of that Ruth the Moabitess who freely chose our people to be her people and the Holy One, blessed be He, to be her God."

I drank and thanked him and asked him, having had no opportunity before, what I owed him for the couriers he had sent so far with that letter to my father which had done more—even more—than save my life.

He laughed. "I did that for the Name. What have we when death comes but our good deeds? In addition, I was not sorry that for once a Jew struck a blow in our defense. And the rebbe said all the time that not only would you be rescued but that a great and goodly thing would come from these happenings."

"He has the soul of a prophet," I said.

Saul Wal laughed joyously. "Yet he is the humblest of men. He lets me, who am an ignorant man of mere affairs, sit oftentimes among his disciples. And the more learned of his disciples blamed him for that. And do you know what he said?"

"Tell me!"

"Look you," he said and laughed, "when some day in the world to come the seven great shepherds of Israel will be sitting at the heavenly feast—Adam, Seth and Methuselah at the right; Abraham, Jacob and Moses at the left, and David the King in the center—and there

comes in a humble ignorant man named Levi Yitzchak, the son of Sara, do you know what I believe? I believe they will nod in kindly fashion at the poor fool and welcome him in their midst."

Then he grew grave. "You and your lady will depart early tomorrow?"

"If that falls in with her wishes," I replied.

"Good. It were not well for the priests to hear of this matter. To be sure, Potocki now has the Princess Lubomirska's letter and I have some little influence with Poniatowski, nor are the *panowie* who read French books very devout. Yet in the end 'tis easier for them not to offend the Church."

It was not long before Braine and Marguerite returned and my beloved had her most flowerlike aspect. If a star could be within a flower and its light glow through the petals thereof—that would be the right similitude.

The hour was now past noon and on the table of Saul Wal and Braine, his wife, a rich meal was spread. And we satisfied our hunger and though Marguerite could communicate only with the daughters of Saul Wal who spoke a little French, the breathing of her contentment melted palpably into my heart. And the meal being over, our good hosts left us together again.

"You have told me all, my beloved," I said, "all except the miracle. For it was a miracle!"

She shook her head and smiled.

"No," she said, "it was not that. Your grandfather said that I was given courage and faith and that the Holy One, blessed be He, was with me as he was with that Valenti Potocki thirty years ago. And it is true that when I came to Paris I went straight to your father's house

and swept past the timorous women and faced your father and said to him: 'I seek Jean de Vidal.'

" 'There is none such,' your father answered sternly.

"I clasped my hands and pleaded with him.

" 'You have a son. It is him that I seek. Tell him that I am here. He may turn me away. But, indeed, I do not think he will.'

"Your father remembered me. He had long known where you had been. I could see that his heart, as you must know, is not given to softness. Yet I must have touched it for a moment, because he told me that you were not in Paris nor any more in Strasbourg, but had gone toward the East on errands of which he did not understand the purpose. With that he was about to turn away from me. But it was a mild summery day and all the doors in the house were open, and our voices must have risen to be heard on the upper floor. For slow and heavy steps came down the stairs and in the door appeared your grandfather. I looked at him and he at me I thought not unkindly.

"And his aspect was so sweet and venerable that I ran to him and cried out: 'Will you help me? Will you help us?'

"He stretched out his hand. It was a gesture half of protection and half of summons and he turned a little, keeping his eyes fixed on me, and I followed him whither he led me up to his study. You know the room. He bade me sit and for a time was silent. Then he said that you had been much in his thoughts and in his heart. He had pondered upon the reasons why you had neither wife nor child nor house nor home. His eyes rested on me for a long time. Then he said that he had lived a very long life and knew the ways of man and of his heart, which is

both wild and subtle. He knew that there were those who had a flame within, and that this flame must be fed. I sat there with head a little bowed but a strange sudden hope within. Now for a while he spoke dreamily, saying that he remembered his own youth. "There is a great poet. You have never heard his name. He wrote: "Oh, life of love, remember the days of thy yearning; let me remember the nights of thy delight." And that poet cried out: "I cannot hear thy voice!" There was a voice for me, too, once upon a time—the voice of voices.'

"He closed his eyes then and, for a little while, I thought he was asleep. Then he looked at me suddenly, burningly. 'I have forgotten the rest of the poem. It is all so long ago. The book of the poet is dusty on an upper shelf.'

"Then he bade me to speak and to tell him the tale of you and me from the beginning even to this day. I saw that from this tale he understood your peacelessness and your wanderings and how it was with us two. Thereupon, I plucked up courage to ask him if there were any hope for you and for me. He told me then the tale of Valenti Potocki, even as he had told it to you. When he ended I saw that he was weary even to faintness. And so I went forth from him with tears, yet not unhopeful.

"But he had said that I was to come again. And so on the third day from that day I sat in his room. Upon his questioning me, I told him how homeless I was in the world and had ever been until I met you and loved you and you loved me in return; how, when I lost you, I felt alone not only in the world but in the universe. And I told him that I had come back because speaking to him and hearing him speak lightened a little the burden of my solitariness.

“He asked me to tell him of anything that I had done in the three days since I had seen him. And I told him that on the second day, loitering so forlornly in what now seemed a strange city to me, I had passed the church of Saint-Sulpice and had slipped in and, seeing a priest enter the confessional, I had followed and had parted the little curtains and kneeled opposite him to confess, as I had been taught to do in my early girlhood and had not done since. I told the priest all my story. He was a kindly old man with white stubbles of beard on his long, pale face. He was neither harsh nor wroth. He said that many women came to him confessing to adulteries, but that adultery with one of the accursed and perfidious Jews was a thing most dreadful and heinous. But he bade me not to despair. Seeing that my husband was dead and that I was young I had a long life before me in which to expiate my sin. To do that he bade me take all my worldly goods and endow therewith the house of the Sisters of The Immaculate Conception and straightway enter the house myself as a novice.

“I told your grandfather that I had fled, fearing that the priest might ask me who I was. And I blamed him not. He said what it was his duty to say; nay, he doubtless believed that his counsel was good and true and saving. Oh, I had no quarrel with him at all. Only his words meant nothing—nothing, nothing! They left me more desolate than before. Doubtless I had been a sinner. But I could not lie and say I was sorry, seeing that from my sin had arisen all the good I had ever known in my whole life. Would it not be blasphemous for a human being to pretend to expiate the only thing which had ever made that human being feel both good and glad?

And so I lifted up my eyes and my whole soul to your grandfather and asked: 'Rabbi, what shall I do?'

"From that day on he began to teach me. He touched but lightly upon the question of your sin and mine, though he said that it was grievous and a breach of the Law of the All Merciful. But he taught me that the Holy One, blessed be He, is in truth the All Merciful whose anger lasts but for a fraction of a moment in eternity. He taught me concerning Israel and its destiny and its law; he spoke to me also of oppression and sorrow and of martyrdom and of the faintness of any hope for Israel amid the peoples of the earth. And it wrought so upon me in my longing for you that I begged him to instruct me concerning command and custom and to teach me the letters of the holy tongue. For it now seemed to me more than ever that, in an empty world where there had never been a place for me nor rest for my feet nor peace for my heart, I was on the threshold of a house in which I who was weary could find rest and I who was homeless could find a home. And it was not long before I could say: 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy habitations, O Israel.'

"After I came out of the ritual bath they called me Ruth and also Sarah. But you will always remember a little the name by which you knew me first?"

"I will! Indeed, I always will!"

"I dwelt with Tamar in the house. I did not go much abroad. For the elders of the community gave your grandfather strange glances and at last one came to him by night to warn him: Would there not be a hue and cry and great danger to the community were the priests to learn of this thing and accuse him of open proselytizing? He answered that he was old and had seen many

things and many woes and had faced and overcome many dangers by the help of the Father of Mercies. Yet he and your father knew that the elders were not wholly wrong. And your father was about to send couriers forth, bidding you to return with all speed, when the Polish courier, dashing down the Jews' street on his last horse, brought your letter. A fever seized us all. But your father's cool counsel prevailed. It was he who asked me whom among the great I had known; it was he who furnished me the coach and servants worthy of a French comtesse, so that I could go to Nancy and intercede with the titular king of Poland, Lesczynski. And, before I left, he gave me strict instructions to impart to you. If, by God's help, you were freed, we were to be married on the instant. Next we were to proceed with all possible speed to Amsterdam in Holland. There friends will receive us, a Jew and a Jewess, a man and his wife, and will help us to travel to the mouth of the river Maas, whence a ship will take us to England.

"Your father has correspondents in England, a country where our people dwell in quietness, where no officer of the king and no priest enters their dwellings or their synagogues; where there are Christians and even princes of their Church who have desired Israel to be free of shame and oppression. There we could dwell. But your father bade me to say further that a correspondent of his in the city of London, a man named Simon Gideon, is fitting out a ship to sail to the island of Jamaica in the West Indies. Jews have dwelt on that island for nigh unto a century, ever since the English captured it from Spain. First Jews of Brazil came; later those of the North. They have houses and counting-houses in the city of Kingston, and sell the products of the island overseas.

There are beautiful houses; there is peace; there are gardens along the waterfront in which people sit at dusk fanned by the cooling breezes from the sea."

She paused and sighed and laid her hand upon my forehead.

"And there was another thing. Both your father and your grandfather bade me to say to you. What was it? Oh, yes, it was this: they believe wars and mighty revolutions to be at hand in Europe. Whether these will bode more ill than good for our people, who can say. Stargazers prophesy an overthrow of kingdoms and the coming of an age of war and a mighty emperor who will give Israel the shadow of freedom without its substance and so prepare the way for disasters yet untold. And it may be that these things will not reach those new islands and continents beyond the sea. Perhaps, men will dwell there together in amity, cultivating righteousness and truth, and love their neighbors even as the God of Truth has bidden them to do."

Peace descended upon my troubled heart in that hour. We can not curb the storms of the world nor greatly the folly and cruelty of men. But he who has peace and love can weather the storms and can hope to do a little toward diminishing the evil in an unredeemed world. We sat hand in hand, my beloved and I, having little need of words, being also weary with all that had happened in that long day. Our good hosts saw that we were utterly spent. They gave us a light repast soon after the setting of the sun and led each of us to one of the small cool chambers commonly occupied by the daughters of the house.

Glint of a pearly sky of dawn through the single window of the chamber awakened me. First there was the

great silence of the autumnal morning with its small keen wind. Then voices rose. Our Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and a group of his followers had fared forth by night to say the great prayers of the beginning of the day here. "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacobi!" I rose and my limbs ached from my long imprisonment. But my heart was lifted, as softly I joined in praise and supplication. From the window at which I stood I could see Levi Yitzchak with his friends behind him. He shook like a flame; he raised his hands to heaven; alternately his voice soared and sobbed. After the last " *Alenu*—it is our duty to praise the Lord of all," he stepped forward. Higher he lifted his hands with a gesture as though to thrust them into the very heavens and his voice rose like the crying of a bugle:

"I bid Thee good morning, Lord of the Universe!
I, Levi Yitzchak, the son of Sara, come before Thee
in a matter of Justice concerning Thy people
Israel.

What purpose hast Thou toward Israel?
Evermore it is written: Command the sons of Israel!
Evermore it is written: Speak to the sons of Israel!
Father of Mercies! How many people dwell upon
earth?

Persians, Babylonians, they of Edom!

The Russians—what say they?

Caesar of Caesars is our Czar!

The Germans—what say they?

Ours is the kingdom of kingdoms!

The French—what say they?

Ours is in truth the Kingdom!

But I, Levi Yitzchak, son of Sara, say:

Magnified and sanctified be His great Name!

And I, Levi Yitzchak, the son of Sara, say:
I will not give way nor yield this place
Until an end be made,
An end, an end of our exile—
Magnified and sanctified be His great Name.”

I dried my eyes and washed and donned my garments and went forth. My beloved came to meet me with her glow as of a star hidden in the petals of a flower. Levi Yitzchak vibrated visibly as they led my beloved and me under the marriage canopy and his voice was a soft singing murmur as he united us and made us one forever.

Our coach with fresh horses was already at the door. But Saul Wal and Braine said that once more we must sit with them at their board.

I turned to Levi Yitzchak who was beside me. “Our tale is a long one to tell—”

He shook his head.

“Let be! When I was but a lad I returned from the house of a great saint. ‘What said he to you?’ my father asked. ‘That God lives.’ ‘No more? All men say that.’ ‘Truly,’ I replied. ‘They say it; I have learned to know it.’ ”

“Ah, I have learned to know it too,” I said.

He blessed us both after the grace had been chanted; Saul Wal said that he would pronounce many a good-luck blessing in memory of us; Braine and her daughters kissed my beloved. We entered our coach; the postilion cracked his whip over the horses: we drove into the fully risen day.

Postscript

The records of the Jewish community of Kingston are not models of accuracy nor have they escaped the ravages either of nature or of man. A year before the threatened French invasion of 1806 a severe cyclone caused the cellars of a synagogue to be inundated and kept underwater for weeks. At that time many precious memorials, especially of those earliest settlers from Brazil, the "Portugals," were lost. Much later during the Negro uprisings which preceded the abolition of slavery in 1833 archives were destroyed and houses burned.

For these reasons few traces of the history of Joshua and Ruth Vidal might have been left. Fortunately their grandson, Moses Vidal (1800-1867), was a citizen of conspicuous ability and patriotism and was the chief in influence among the eight Jews who sat in the Legislative Assembly of 1848. At that time, such was the respect and good will of the islanders toward their Jewish fellow citizens, that sessions of the Legislative Assembly were regularly suspended on the Day of Atonement.

It was the granddaughter of this Moses Vidal, Esther Vidal de Pinha of Buenos Aires, who, hearing indirectly of the finding of the memoirs—long thought lost—of

her great-great-grandfather, Joshua Vidal, communicated with an editor on the staff of the *Biblioteca de la Editorial Israel* in the Argentinian capital. This now aged lady had always cherished the traditions on both sides of her house—her mother was one of the Moïse family of South Carolina—and had preserved letters and fragmentary diaries of her ancestors. Her account of her great-great-grandparents has all the notes of authenticity.

Joshua and Ruth Vidal arrived in Kingston in the early spring of 1773. They were provided with letters and letters of credit, as well as with ready monies through Simon Gideon and other bankers of London. They bought a very beautiful house in which their son and only child Eleazar was born just one year later. To the astonishment of the community, Joshua Vidal engaged in no trade or business. His original fortune, which was not great, was soon augmented by sums consigned him by his father. The death of his grandfather, the Rabbi Ventura, in 1774 and of his father a few years later rendered him independent.

Nor was this the only circumstance which amazed the friends of the Vidals. Both husband and wife afforded an example of piety such as the busy commercial community had not yet seen. They were neither superficially strict nor were they ever either intolerant or morose. With joy and simplicity, they lived an almost festive Jewish life, and tales long lingered in Kingston of the sabbath eves and noble, almost communal, Passover celebrations in their house. On one or two points they were quietly severe. They hired servants among the manumitted Negroes; they refused to buy slaves. They shunned all, whether Jew or gentile, who had any hand in the slave trade until its abolition in 1807. Both, but

especially Ruth Vidal, were in touch with those precursors of Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay in London who were agitating for the abolition of the trade. This caused the Vidals to be regarded with great bitterness by both the planters and the traders during certain years. But the perfect harmony and oneness between these spouses was such that the beauty of their lives but shone more clearly through the isolation to which during certain years they were subjected.

It was during these years that, according to Señora de Pinha, Joshua Vidal took out certain fragmentary diaries or memoirs that he had written, and despatched them to that Herz Cerfberr of Strasbourg to whom he was bound, until the latter's death in 1779, by strong ties of affection and respect.

Of the later years of Joshua and Ruth Vidal, Señora de Pinha had fewer particulars to communicate. But she was certain of this much: a glow was about them that set them apart from the common run of men and women. They seemed to their neighbors never busy yet never unemployed. They gave their son Eleazar a most careful education, themselves grounding him thoroughly first in Jewish matters, teaching him to have—an increasingly rare thing in the New World—a perfect mastery of Hebrew, but seeking to prepare him for no active calling. It was entirely Eleazar's own decision that caused him in 1796 to repair to Philadelphia in the United States to study medicine.

Joshua Vidal survived until 1813. Though he had stood aside from the practical affairs of the world, his word and attitude and counsel came to be heard, sought, quietly revered more and more as the years went on, first by his Jewish brethren but also by certain Christians, both lay

and clerical, of the colony. Nor did that glow and spiritual confidence depart from Ruth during the decade that she survived her husband. The tranquil authority of her old age was long remembered. Rabbis and members of the Legislative Assembly came to her. But also wanderers and fugitives and slaves. During her lifetime her son, Dr. Eleazar Vidal, would take no fee from any for his services; when she died the rabbis of the two congregations declared in the presence of the king's Captain-General, who sat in the synagogue with covered head, that a princess in Israel, such as appeared but rarely in these later ages, was about to be carried to the grave.

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